GOOD WORDS

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"Good Words are Worth much and cost little."—Herbert.

GOOD WORDS

FOR 1880.

EDITED BY

DONALD MACLEOD, D.D.,

ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS FOR SCOTLAND

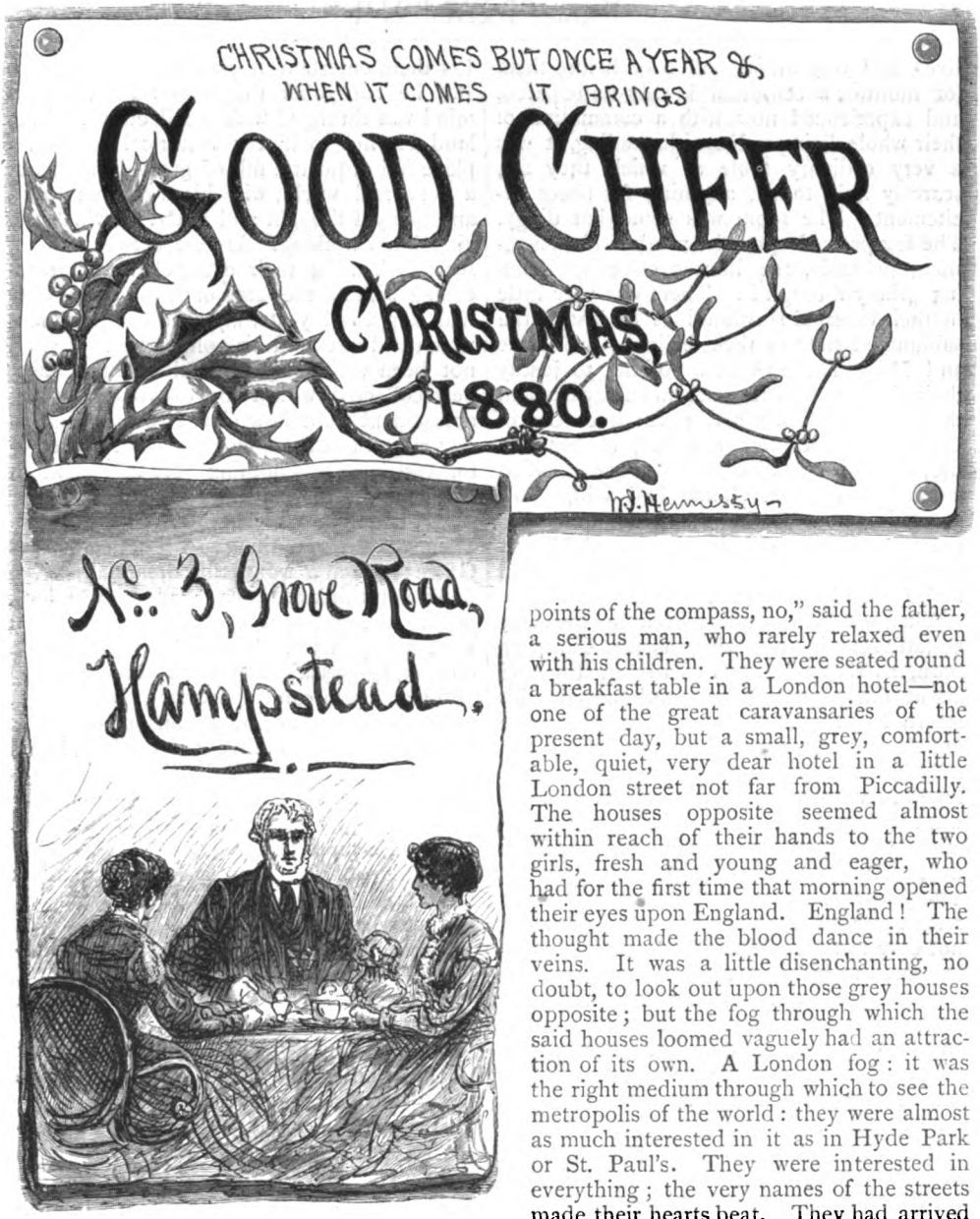
And Illustrated by

W. J. HENNESSY, JOHN COLLIER, G. L. SEYMOUR, E. RISCHGITZ, G. MONTBARD, T. R. MACQUOID, T. DAVIDSON, E. JENNINGS, R. T. PRITCHETT, AND OTHERS.

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Frontispiece. "WHO COULD IT BE WHO LIVED AT 3, GROVE ROAD?"



CHAPTER I.

"WHERE shall we go first? that is the only question. I know there are a hundred places to go to. Westminster, and Whitehall, and the Tower, and St. Paul's, and to see the pictures, and the river, and the Temple, and Cheapside. We cannot, of course," cried the eager girl, half regretfully, half pleased with the certainty of so much to do, "see them all in one day."

"Considering that they are at different points of the compass, no," said the father, a serious man, who rarely relaxed even with his children. They were seated round a breakfast table in a London hotel—not one of the great caravansaries of the present day, but a small, grey, comfortable, quiet, very dear hotel in a little London street not far from Piccadilly. The houses opposite seemed almost within reach of their hands to the two girls, fresh and young and eager, who had for the first time that morning opened their eyes upon England. England! The thought made the blood dance in their veins. It was a little disenchanting, no doubt, to look out upon those grey houses opposite; but the fog through which the said houses loomed vaguely had an attraction of its own. A London fog: it was the right medium through which to see the metropolis of the world: they were almost as much interested in it as in Hyde Park or St. Paul's. They were interested in everything; the very names of the streets made their hearts beat. They had arrived from Canada in the great steamboat the day before, had travelled up from Liverpool through a country veiled in the early and lingering dusk of a winter afternoon —for, though it was nominally spring, it was still winter — and entered London in the dark. When they opened their eyes this morning it had been, as they thought, upon a new world. They could hear the noise of wheels in Piccadilly, and that sound also went to their hearts. All England was before them. They had heard of it all their

lives, and this arrival had been before them for months, a sensation keenly anticipated, and experienced now with a commotion of their whole being. Notwithstanding, it was a very ordinary table at which they sat, scarcely able to eat anything for sheer excitement. The room was somewhat dingy. The fog pressed upon the window like something palpable, the houses opposite looming grimly through it. There was very little in their external surroundings to justify the sublimated state of their feelings; but Grace and Milly Yorke wanted nothing to justify their feelings. These sentiments sustained themselves. They had never been out of Canada before, but England, as long as they could recollect, had been called "home" to them. They had said, "We are going home," when they communicated the great news to their friends. And now the moment had come to which they had looked forward for years.

Their father was not moved by the same ecstatic sentiments. He was not Canadian born, as they were. He had left England about thirty years before, and probably his return had recalled some feelings that were not altogether delightful. He was an angular, tall man, not unlike the commonly received type of an American, with a long face, somewhat sunken cheeks, a very resolute and determined mouth, grey and rugged, like a gnarled tree. His eyes were deep-set and apt to get a fiery sparkle in them on occasions. He was a man of hot temper and inflexible obstinacy, not easy to deal with. But he was never ill-tempered to his children. The boys, indeed, were often more or less in conflict with their father; but to the girls he was always gentle and kind. Perhaps they knew better how to glide over all shoals and reefs, and find the safe channel to his favour. They and their mother knew very well what subjects it was best to avoid. They had put up danger signals on every side, and warned each other off this and that difficulty with a glance. They did this without intention, only half conscious of their own diplomacy. But so it was, that the girls were on the best of terms with their father, and to them he never said a hasty or unkind word. He sat very gravely between them, his countenance taking no reflection from the light in theirs. He was disposed rather to say, Confound the fog. He thought London just as dingy and disagreeable as it always had been; but he said nothing. The girls! The girls had their heads turned, poor children. He would not say anything to disturb their illusion. Let them entertain it as long as they could. But he had other things to think of. His mind was thronged with recollections. England was not to him a historical country, a place full of poetry, full of great events; but a very real world, with his own past in it, and many a thought and intent of which the girls knew nothing. He sat between them, scarcely hearing their eager chatter, but recalling with all the force of reality, as if they had happened yesterday, the circumstances which had attended his going away. He had not been very many years older than Grace, he recollected, with a sort of wondering half amusement; but how clear it was! Yesterday was not clearer—not so clear, indeed—for yesterday was nothing very important in his life; whereas that day——

"It is quite true what Mr. Winthrop said. I never saw anything so poetical," said Grace; "such a wonderful dreamy vista!—don't you think so, papa? When you look out to the end of the street you can't tell what it is you see. The light is just like a dull topaz—wasn't that what Mr. Winthrop said? and you can't tell what is beyond; it might be palaces or mountains, or one can't tell what. And to think it is England! and then that sort of roar of the carriages. It is not like the sea; it is like—— Oh, why should one try for similes?—it is like—just London, I suppose."

"Wait till you know a little more about London," said the father, "before you pronounce what it's like."

"One knows," said Grace, with a little solemnity. "One does not need to wait. I suppose London is like no other place in the world."

"Perhaps not," Yorke said with a half laugh; "but you will never know what it is if you should live a hundred years."

He spoke in one sense, they responded in another.

"I can believe that," said Grace, with the same gravity. "It is a mystery. We cannot know, but we can divine."

"God forbid!" her father said, and then he changed his tone. "Westminster is one way and St. Paul's another," he said. "You can't go both ways at once. You had better make up your minds which you will have."

And then a little argument ensued. The girls had read a great deal, and they had good memories. One of them espoused the cause of St. Paul's and the other that of Westminster: the one going over the glorious inhabitants of the Abbey, demanding, with Milton—

"What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones
The labour of an age in piled stones?"

and exclaiming—

"Oh, rare Ben Jonson!"

while the other launched herself upon Tennyson's fine ode—

"Mighty Seaman, this is he,
Was great by land as thou by sea."

The father remained quite silent in the midst of it all. It seemed, indeed, as if he had betrayed them into this fanciful controversy on purpose that he might be able to take refuge in his own thoughts. What was Westminster or St. Paul's to him? His mind was busy with events which no poet had ever celebrated, which had never been put into history. Neither wife nor children knew of them—only some people at home, people who might be dead long ago, whom he had not heard of, and who had not heard of him, for thirty years. He got the required leisure and quiet to think this all over while the others were busy with their poetry. They appealed to him, and he gave them a little nod and half smile, one of those smiles that are but for a moment, a gleam of enforced attention instantly falling back into the gravity of prevailing thought. The decision finally was for Westminster. As for these young people, they did not know the difference between St. Paul's and the Abbey. They were both old, reverend, glorious structures to Grace and Milly; but what it might be that made the difference between them they did not know. One meant Poets' Corner, the other that about the mighty Seaman. They had never seen a Gothic cathedral in their lives.

And perhaps it is not ignorance so profound as this that is qualified to see and understand what is best. The girls read the names on the walls with a kind of silent ecstasy of wonder. To think that they, two little girls from Canada, should actually be treading the storied pavement in Poets' Corner, and should be able to read with their own eyes the names upon those monuments, and see the Kings and Queens lying in marble, in soulless state, and touch with their little living modern fingers the chair in which the Confessor had sat! Could anything be more wonderful? They went through it all as if they were in a dream, looking at the monuments, reading all the names, thinking it was their own want of clear historical knowledge that made them at a loss about one here and there. But the Abbey itself was above their comprehension. They thought the Houses of Parliament finer, and were a little shocked that everything should be so grey and old. When you have seen nothing that is not new, all your life, it is difficult to understand the darkening of ages. But they spent the entire morning in one dream of pleasure, their hearts standing still as they came upon name after name which they had heard of all their lives. There too was Whitehall, and that gloomy window, of which, perhaps, it is not true that from thence King Charles stepped to his execution; but they were not too critical; and they walked up the Mall to St. James's Palace with a little thrill of admiration (which they thought rather vulgar in themselves, and were disposed to blush for) for the Life-guardsmen on their horses. The little dingy old palace wounded their feelings somewhat, and brought down the bewildering splendour of imagination into very shabby limits; but they got over that. When they were not silent with awe, or with the shock of trying to reconcile to their own ideal something that fell short of it, they were talking all the way, calling upon each other to see this or that, reading out even the names of the streets to each other with many an "Oh, Milly!" and "Oh, Grace!" They were so absorbed in their sight-seeing that they never noticed the people who looked after them, the amused admiring looks with which the passers-by would contemplate their fresh faces. They were very fresh faces, delicate in colour, clear and animated, and so full of interest that their superabundant life brightened the foggy street. But fortunately the fog had lifted a little, and all the ghostly houses round the park, and the leafless trees, became more real with a mid-day radiance of the sun doing his best to break through; and if they had thought the fog poetical before, you may imagine what they thought it now, with those rays streaming into it. It could not be real, they said to each other; by-and-by they would wake up and find themselves, let us say, in that other London which is on the farther side of the Atlantic. It could not be real; it was too wonderful to be true.

Meantime the father went on responding a little, but only a little, to the constant claim made upon his attention. He said "Yes" and "No," or even "Very pretty," "Very nice," "Very interesting" on occasion. For his part he did not care very much about the monuments. Sometimes his eye would wander away among the aisles, or through the lovely tracery and carved work of the roofs, to where the faint red sun caught a painted window, and threw a rosy oblique ladder of many colours across the grey. He

understood the Abbey better than the girls did; but what he saw in the Abbey was, scenes of the past—the past, not of Shakespeare or the old Kings, but his own. He had been there in his youth, and he had been in other places which were recalled and suggested by this, and he remembered and mused in his heart. His companions were not surprised, because he was always a man of few words; though afterwards it gave them many thoughts, and the question, what he had been thinking of, what fancies might have been rising unconsciously in his mind, was often discussed by them; but at the present moment, as was natural, they did not realise that there was anything out of the way in his silence. They went back to their hotel late for their luncheon; they were tired in body, but not in their minds, which flowed over with wonder and pleasure. "Are you the least little bit disappointed?" said Milly to Grace. "No, not the least. Disappointed!" cried Grace with enthusiasm, though the next moment she was conscious of that little chill in her soul about St. James's, and even felt that she had missed something in Westminster. This being the case with Grace, Milly cleared up in a moment from the slightest little cloud that had fallen upon her, and felt that neither was she disappointed, oh, not the least in the world! It was like walking with Shakespeare, they both said. And Mr. Yorke gave a little nod across the table, and lifted his eyebrows at them. It was almost as much as he ever did when they were in full tide of enthusiasm. Papa was always quiet; though perhaps, indeed, he was more preoccupied than usual to-day. The winterly spring afternoon was beginning to close in a little before this meal was over. They were preparing, however, to go out again when their father called them to the window where he was sitting, looking more grave even than he was accustomed to look.

"I am going out," he said. "Can you manage for yourselves till dinner? I have something to do—out."

"Can't we go with you, papa?" they both said in a breath.

There was a kind of embarrassment on his face. "Not to-day, I think. After—perhaps: I have a call to make."

"Oh, it is about business!" said Milly, wondering, yet apologetic, looking at Grace.

"If it is not about business," said Grace promptly, "you ought to take us with you, papa. It is the right thing in England. In England girls don't go about by themselves; and then we want some friends, we want to know the people as well as the place."

A half smile went over his face. "You shall get the benefit of all the introductions," he said. "Don't be afraid; but you must not expect to be taken much notice of in London, just on the edge of the season, you know. People are very busy here; and then there are so many to be looked after—people of more pretensions than you. You must not expect too much; but I am not going to deliver any of the letters. I am going—to see an—old friend."

"Oh, then, bring him here—will you please bring him here? Do, papa, do! If it is an old friend, so much the more reason that we should know him. Is it a friend you had before you went to Canada? Why has he never come to see us? We have always wondered that you never had any old friends come to see you, papa."

Yorke did not make any direct reply. He said only, "What will you do with yourselves while I am away?"

The two girls looked at each other somewhat blankly.

"We can't stay in here," cried Milly, while Grace drew herself up with youthful dignity.

"As for staying in every time you have any business to do, or any calls to make," she said, with serious emphasis, "you must see that is impossible, papa. English girls may stop in-doors if they please, but we cannot. We are Canadian girls; we are used to take care of ourselves. Milly and I can surely take care of each other wherever we go. It would be too humbling," she cried, "in the country of Shakespeare, to think two girls couldn't go out without—what was it, Milly? —unpleasantness. I don't believe a word of it. Mrs. Bidwell is only a vulgar Englishwoman. Unpleasantness! I don't believe it; and even if I did believe it I shouldn't allow it to be true."

"Come," said her father, "you must not talk so of vulgar Englishwomen—you who are such enthusiasts for England. No, I don't see the harm in it. Come with me so far, I'll take you to where the shops are. Of course you would like to look into the shops."

They would have liked a great deal better to go with him upon this mysterious call, but he would not permit it, and accordingly they were taken to Regent Street, where he left them with a beautiful confidence—the last place in the world to leave young girls alone on a spring afternoon, no doubt; but what did they know of that? They were innocent,

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proud, modest girls, to whom no one had ever said a disrespectful word, and who were afraid of nobody. Nor did they get any new light upon the subject from that walk. The innocent do not even suspect the dangers which the knowing see all about them. Nobody molested Grace and Milly: they walked along in their armour of honest maidenhood, knowing no evil; and were as safe as in their own rooms. It was true, however, that their rapture waned a little, and a touch of local patriotism came over them.

"I don't think so very much of the shops," said Milly doubtfully.

Milly was often the first to start an opinion, but she never was quite sure whether she held it or not till she had the support of Grace's authority, which this time, as so often, was unhesitatingly given.

"I don't think anything of the shops," said Grace. "Of course one doesn't come to England to look at shops. Paris for that, I suppose; but it is England all the same."

"Oh yes," said Milly, "certainly it is England all the same. I wish the houses were a little bigger and cleaner-looking, and the streets broader. I wish there were some trees——"

"Trees! in the heart of London," said Grace, with high contempt. "Trees are the very things that show how new a place is. Where you have nothing else you have trees. But think how many people must have walked about here. If we only could see them all strolling up and down this pavement—people you would give your head to see."

"But Shakespeare—and people like that—could not have walked about Regent Street: it is not old enough."

"No; not Shakespeare, perhaps. I don't know—he might have walked about here, though it was not Regent Street then."

"I wonder," said Milly suddenly, "where papa can have gone. I never heard him talk of any old friends before; nor relations. By the way, isn't it very funny that we have no relations in England, Grace?"

"It is strange," said Grace thoughtfully.

It was not a subject which had occurred to them till now. Their father they were aware had been thirty years in Canada without ever going "home;" and he had no family correspondence, nobody belonging to him that they knew of except themselves. Their mother was a Canadian born, and she had relations in plenty; and cousins on their father's side had not seemed a necessity before. But as they thought of it, a little additional chill came into the air. England—so dear and delightful as it was: the home of all their traditions—they had begun to make acquaintance with. But to think that they had not a relation in England, nothing to justify their fond identification of themselves with this old country! The idea was somewhat alarming as it burst upon them. It increased the little shade of disappointment which had crept over them against their will, and sent them to their hotel, which was all that answered for home at this moment, with a little heaviness at their hearts.

CHAPTER II.

MR. YORKE went out in the quickly fading spring afternoon with an air of seriousness and resolution, which, indeed, had been upon his countenance all day; but which was not much like the expression of a holiday visitor. He had a long drive out to the northern outskirts of London, across those miles on miles of insignificant streets which are almost more imposing in their shabby dreariness than the more important portions of the greatest of cities. But though they wearied him with endless lines of shabbiness and monotony, the mind of the stranger was not sufficiently at liberty to make any reflection upon them. It was twilight before he reached, mounting upwards slowly for the last mile or so, the suburban heights to which he was bound. He dismissed his cab at the entrance to a leafy lane, lined on each side with detached houses, which were scarcely perceptible among the bare trees and thick hedges. To the servant who admitted him he gave a name which was certainly not that which he had borne an hour before in his hotel. The house which he entered just at the moment of darkness, before the lamps were lighted, was very warmly carpeted and curtained, and almost too warm in the air of its balmy soft interior. He waited for a moment in the hall, with an extraordinary gravity—the seriousness of painful restrained excitement on his face. Then a door opened suddenly, and a lady came out carrying a candle in her hand. The light shone pleasantly upon a fresh face and pretty eyes, undimmed by some fifty years of life; but those eyes were puckered up with a curious, anxious, alarmed gaze, looking into the darkness. She advanced hurriedly for two or three steps, then stopped short in front of the stranger, examining him not without some distress in her look. "Leonard Crosthwaite," she said, "it is very many years since we have heard that name. Is it some distant cousin we know nothing about? or is it—— is it——"

"It is I, Mary. We have not seen each other for thirty years—but I should have known you anywhere, I think. Certainly, here, in the old house."

She held up her candle and gazed at him, then shook her head slowly. "It is so sudden," she said. "It is such a long time——"

"And you did not expect to see me, while I expected—hoped—to see you." Then he put out his hand. "Mary—you are not still Mary—not a Crosthwaite still, as in the old time? No—I can see that. You have married, and had children—like me."

This drew a faint little smile from her in spite of herself. "Yes, I have married. I have a son as tall as you. I am a widow. I—— Oh, but I don't know if I ought to enter into family particulars. How am I to know that you are—Leonard? You are—a little like him."

"Is there any reason why you should hesitate to own me?" he said, half sternly, yet with a smile.

This brought an overpowering flush of colour over her comely, matronly face; but the next moment she cried out with agitation, "Oh, no, no! How could you think so of me?—not for the world, not for the world! If every penny we had depended on it"—and here she stopped short, confused, and looked at him again.

"I will not meddle with your pennies, Mary, whatever you may mean by that. I have plenty. You need not fear for me. Ah!—Uncle Abraham, I suppose, is dead?—he must be dead long ago: and there is something—— The old people are all dead, I suppose?"

"It is not that," she said, faltering, which was no answer to his question; but he understood it well enough. He looked at her with increasing seriousness, and she shrank before his eye.

"Yes: they are all dead——"

"Uncle Abraham and all——" He looked at her more and more keenly, with a slight smile on his face. "But he did not take his money with him, I suppose, as he used to threaten to do?"

To this the lady made no reply; and there was a pause, he standing somewhat sternly, with his eyes fixed upon her; she with her head drooping a little, drawn back a few steps, not looking at him. The door behind her was open, and, after a minute, a voice called from it, "Mary, who are you talking to there?"

The stranger started visibly. He said, with a sudden catch in his voice, "Anna! Is she here?"

"Oh yes, Leonard, yes," said the lady. "She is here—so changed! so changed! I think it is because she has been unhappy."

"Unhappy!" he said softly. His tone had changed and softened; only to hear it the listener might be certain that there were tears in his eyes. "Unhappy! after thirty years."

The man was touched and flattered and compunctious all in one. There was no difficulty in interpreting the inflections in his voice. It was full of tenderness, of a mournful pleasure, and surprise as well—"while I have been making myself so comfortable," he added in an undertone.

"Oh, not in that way," the lady said, but in a whisper. "No, no," shaking her head, "not in that way."

His mood of tender complaisance was perhaps a little subdued by this, but only a little. "If you think she would let me see her," he said—

At this moment she was called again—"Mary! there is a perfect gale blowing in at the door. Who have you there?"

The lady who was called Mary advanced to him confidentially. "She heard your name just as well as I did," she said, "but she pretends to take no notice; wait here till I go and speak to her. Oh, she is so changed!"

He caught her by the hand and detained her. "Nothing has happened? She must be old like all of us, I know——"

"She is as handsome as ever she was," said the other hastily. "I am coming, I am coming, Anna! It is a visitor — an old friend—" and she turned round with the quickness of a girl, leaving the stranger standing where she had found him, the candle on the hall table watching him like a little wakeful sentinel. A glow of warmth and light came from the door of the open room. He had not noticed it before; now it appeared to him like a glimpse into some sanctuary. He could see a beautiful Persian carpet, a softly-tinted wall hung with pictures; not that he noticed what these details were, but took them in vaguely as producing an effect of delicate brightness and luxury. Memory stole softly over the far-travelled visitor. His present life had departed from him altogether—he was living in the past, in his youth, thinking of the pretty caprices of the girl whom he had thought the most beautiful, the most delightful creature that God had made, in all her whims and fancies. She

had always been like that; and through all those thirty years it had been constantly suggested to him, in the inmost recesses of his mind, when he saw anything that was graceful or pretty, "It is just like Anna—Anna would have liked that." He had felt inclined to say it to his wife a thousand times—his good wife, who never had heard of Anna, and would not have heard of her with any pleasure. And now, here was Anna close to him, enshrined in the warmth and surrounded by all the prettinesses she had loved. It made his heart beat to think that he was so near her, that he would see her presently—and even that she had been unhappy. At fifty-five men are not often sentimental, but the hardest would be softened by the thought of a beautiful woman who had been unhappy about him for thirty years. He stood quite patiently, and waited for admittance. The hesitation of the other, her evident unwillingness to consent to his identity, which he could see was mingled all the time with a conviction that he was the person he claimed to be, had irritated and filled him with suspicions; but all this flew away upon the breath of old, old, unchangeable feeling. Anna! he had never ceased to think that the very name was music all these years.

The sound of the voices within the room was low at first, but afterwards grew louder. Then it was mingled with impatient tappings as of a stick on the floor, and Mary's voice—he could trace both voices, they were so different, even in the murmur of talk at the beginning—took an expostulatory tone.

"I assure you, Anna——"

"Assure me nothing. Let him come in, let him come in, and I will let him know what I think of him."

It was certainly her voice; but in all his recollection he had never heard this tone in it. He waited listening, half amused, half sad, beginning to wonder more and more. At last he yielded to a sudden impulse, and went straight forward to the half-opened door.

There he stood for a moment arrested, struck dumb. And they, too, struck by the sound of the man's foot, so different from their own velvet steps, turned round and looked at him. Was that Anna? His heart, which had been beating so high, stopped short, and seemed to drop, drop into some unknown depths. "Oh yes, I see," he said to himself, "I see, I see. She is as handsome as ever——" But was that Anna? He stood on the threshold of this room, which was sacred to her, holding his breath.

Then the strange old woman, who was Anna, beckoned to him imperiously with her hand.

"Come in, come in," she said, "whoever you are, who are using a name—— Come in. I do not know if you are aware that Mr. Leonard Crosthwaite, whose name you are assuming——" Here she stopped and fixed two great, brilliant, dark eyes upon him, opened to their full width, glowing like angry stars. She made a pause of about a minute long, which seemed to the two others like an hour. Then she dropped her voice with a careless inflection, as if after that gaze she disdained the risk she was running—"died," she added indifferently, but pausing on the word—"at least twenty years ago."

"He did not die, Anna, since I am here," said the stranger.

It was impossible to speak to her, even now, without some tenderness getting into his voice.

"Do not venture to speak to me, sir, by my Christian name. Do you know there is a punishment for impostors? Oh, you think perhaps you know just how far you can go without infringing the law. Perhaps you think, too, that we are alone here, and you can frighten us. But that is a mistake. There is a butler, a strong man, whom I can summon in a moment with this bell, and there is my nephew. Any attempt at bullying or extortion will be useless here."

"Oh, Anna!," her sister cried; then she clasped her hands, turning to the visitor—"I told you she was changed."

A series of different emotions passed over the Canadian's face—he smiled, then laughed angrily, then grew red and hot with indignation; but over these variations stole such a softening of regret as combined all in one sorrowful sense of change. He nodded his head gently in reply to what the other sister said.

"You are right," he said in a low tone; "as handsome as ever, but how different! Anna, Anna, though we have been separated so long—though you cast me off, and I thought had forgotten me—though I am married and a happy man—yet you have never been put out of your place in my heart all these years."

She looked at him with those keen eyes; though she kept up wonderfully her air of lofty scorn and indifference, it was possible to perceive a gleam of something else, a mixture of satisfaction and anger in her face. "It is part of the rôle, of course," she said

scornfully, "to call me by my Christian name. But Leonard Crosthwaite, whatever he might be else, was a gentleman. So you will keep to your part better by acting like a gentleman in this point. That is one way of making an impostor like him."

He restrained himself with an effort. "What am I to call you then?" he said, looking at her sister. "Has she never married? How wonderful that is! Miss Crosthwaite then: since you wish it, I will call you so."

A momentary shadow of humiliation went over the proud face. She had chosen not to marry. She had always been beautiful, and she was not without fortune; but nobody whom she thought good enough had ever asked Anna Crosthwaite to marry him. And she did not like to remember this in presence of her old lover, whom she loved once in her silly youth, though she forsook him: it was not, however, because of that love, or anything connected with it, that she received him thus now.

"I am Miss Crosthwaite," she said, "though you affect to be surprised. It is not all a woman thinks of to marry any fool that turns up, and to become the mother of fools. Go away to your son, Mary. That was your ambition; as it is your folly now, to believe in every deception, and allow yourself to be led by the nose. I think your *protégé* had better withdraw too, now that I have seen him. He has not a feature of poor Leonard Crosthwaite," she added, eyeing him steadfastly. "No one, I suppose, can doubt my capacity to judge. His complexion is different, his features are different. Go away, sir, and be thankful we don't turn you over at once to the police."

"Is this," he said, half-stifled with astonishment and indignation, "is this all you have to say to me——"

"It is all I have to say to you," she said; "and this is my room, where I am supposed to have some right to choose my visitors. Go! You can do anything you please; I, for one, am not afraid of you. You may go."

He burst out laughing at the extraordinary perversity of the scene. If he had not laughed he must have been furious—it was his only deliverance; and yet it may be supposed there was not much laughing in his heart.

"This is the most extraordinary reception to meet with," he said, "after coming so far, after staying away so long. If it is a jest, it is a bad jest, Anna. Suppose that it is hard upon us after all this long interval, to look upon each other with such changed eyes—still there is such a thing as justice. You know me as well as I know you. It is by instinct—it is because we cannot help it. For, heaven knows, you are as unlike the Anna I left as night is to day."

She did not reply. A hasty gleam of passion came out of her keen eyes. Then she put out her hand to the bell. "Simmons," she said, "will see this person to the door, Mary. I don't want to be hard upon any acquaintance of yours; you know a very strange set of people, I must say; but I will not be insulted. Simmons must see this person out of the house."

The other sister looked at him with a look of agonized entreaty, clasping her hands. He was touched by it, though his only answer to Anna was another outburst of harsh laughter. "I would not like to be in your Simmons' shoes," he said, "if he tries to see me anywhere that I do not choose to go. But I do not care to thrust myself on anybody. Goodbye, Anna; we will meet ere long in different circumstances, never fear."

With that he went out hastily into the hall, where the sentinel candle was still burning. There he was met by a young man who looked at him surprised. There was so much resemblance in this new-comer to the lady called Mary that there could be no doubt who he was. The Canadian did not pause to inquire. He put his hand on the young man's arm—"Come out with me, or take me somewhere where I can talk to you. There is a mystery that wants clearing up, and you can help me. I am your mother's cousin, Leonard Crosthwaite. What! you have heard the name before?"

"Indeed, I have heard the name: but you were supposed to be dead long ago," the young man said.

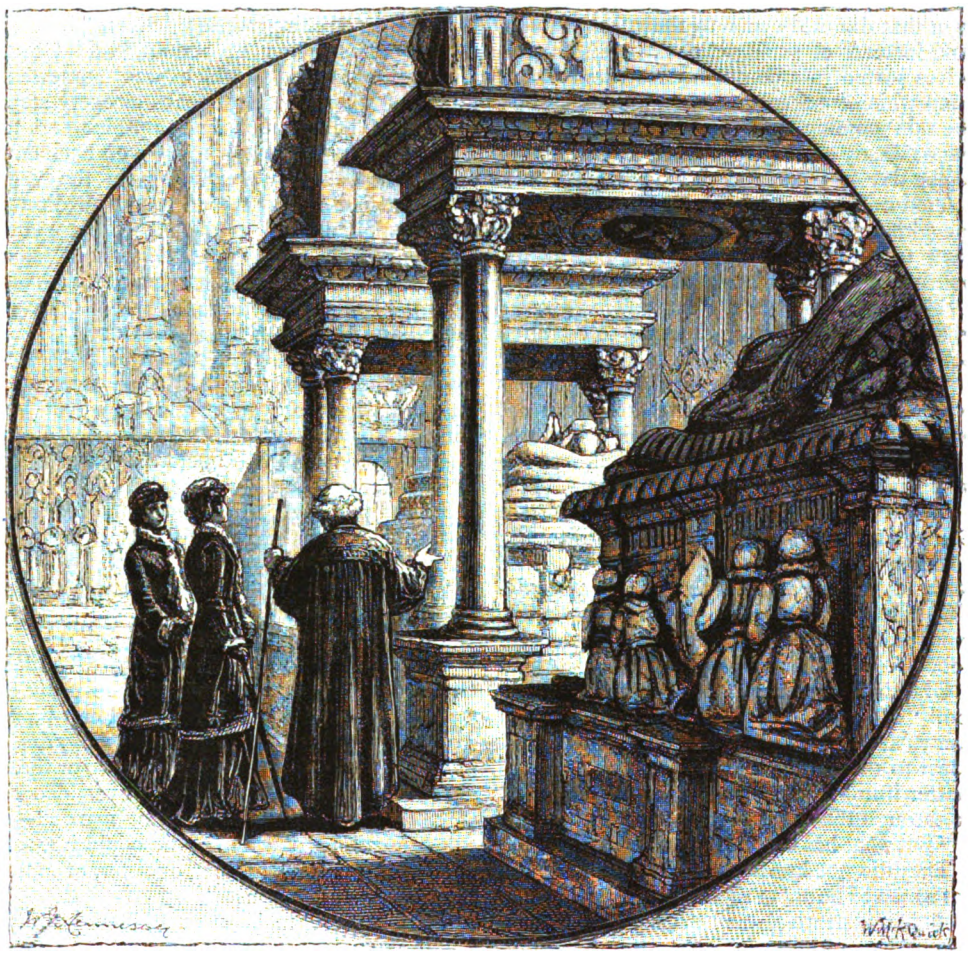
"I am not dead—your mother will tell you—I am newly returned from Canada. Tell me what reason there is to wish me dead," he said peremptorily. "It will be no worse for you——"

"No reason at all, sir," said the young man promptly. "I do not know who you are, but there is nothing to conceal. You are welcome to hear it all for me."

Then he led the visitor into a small room at the other side of the hall, into which after a while the young man's mother stole softly, crying and greatly agitated. She was startled beyond measure to find the visitor with her son, to whom she was going for consolation. But they were not long in convincing her that it was better that all there was to tell should be told.

When Mr. Yorke left the house it was very

dark and cold, and the rain beginning to drizzle. Young Geoffrey Underwood would have gone with him, or, failing that, pressed all manner of wraps upon him, as his mother had pressed refreshments, but the Canadian smiled at the cold, and the dismal, continuous, but not violent rain. "I am used to worse cold than this," he said. He went out into the night, more grave than when he had entered, but with a fire in his eye and in his heart of which there had been no sign when he came. He walked slowly along making calculations, arranging his course of procedure as he went down the hill. The rain came down faster and faster, till it swept like a great sheet of water from the inky sky. It swept all the suburban streets both of passengers and vehicles; nothing was to be seen



"The Kings and Queens lying in marble."—Page 3.

but the wavering dismal lamps, making distorted reflections on the wet pavement—not a cab, not a place of shelter. Mr. Yorke was drenched to the bones and chilled to the very heart.

CHAPTER III.

An evening in a hotel is seldom cheerful, and this evening was very forlorn. Mr. Yorke did not return, though the hour for which he had ordered dinner was past. The girls sat very dolefully one on each side of the table, and read the books which had been provided for their amusement on board ship. Everything had been so lively on board ship, there had been so much society, so many expedients to make the time pass pleasantly, that they had not required to have recourse to

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these works. It was very strange and dreadfully disenchanting on their first night in London to be compelled to take to this way of getting through the evening. They expected to have been dining, cheerfully chatting about all their impressions, or, perhaps, though it was the first night, to have been taken to a theatre, and seen Shakespeare, perhaps, on Shakespeare's native soil. Perhaps if they had attained this object of their desires they might not have found it much more satisfactory—but then that did not occur to their fresh minds. And instead of such delights, to find themselves seated in a commonplace room with a lamp which smoked, and two dull novels, and the rain coming down in bucketfuls outside, was as dreary and disappointing a termination to the day as could well be supposed. The solemn waiter came in and laid the cloth, and the girls had to change their places. Grace went to the window and gazed out at the pouring rain and the street lamps twinkling feebly through it. Milly sat down vacantly in a big chair, too far off the lamp to continue her book.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said the soft-voiced waiter: "will you have the dinner up, or wait till the gentleman comes?"

"O Grace!" said Milly, startled, appealing to her sister.

"Of course, we will wait for papa," said Grace, turning round from the window.

When the man went away poor little Milly, overtired and depressed, fell a-crying. "Oh, how strange it is! Oh, how lonely it is!" she cried. "I feel as if there was nobody—nobody that knew us."

Grace's lip twitched and quivered a little too. "How silly!" she said; "this is how you always are—up to the skies one moment, and down to the depths the next. What does it matter if nobody knows us? Two of us can go through the world—with papa."

"But what has become of papa?" said Milly.

They did not know what to think. He was not a man to be out at night, nor, though he was so undemonstrative, was he a man to abandon his children to an evening in an inn by themselves. Could anything have happened to him? There flashed across the minds of both recollections of stories they had heard, of sudden disappearances, stories mixed up in a great confusion with the Morgue, of which they remembered the name and the dismal use, without clearly remembering where it was; and of people found in the river, and all kinds of terrible catastrophes. These were so much too terrible, however, that after a while Grace laughed.

"What are you laughing at? I don't feel at all like laughing," Milly said in an aggrieved tone.

"We are behaving as if something had happened," Grace said; "such nonsense! Papa has been detained, that's all. I hope he is not getting wet out in this rain."

"Oh, I hope he is not getting wet!" Milly said, rising up hastily and running to the window. Milly had a turn for taking care of everybody's health. She was pleased with the importance of being a little "delicate" herself.

"I don't see how he should," said Grace with another laugh, which was somewhat forced, "when there are cabs at every step. Of course, he has not made up his mind to get wet, or to get lost, or to have an accident, solely to make us uncomfortable the very first day, like a naughty child. The dinner will be spoiled; that is all that will happen."

"As if it mattered about the dinner!" said Milly with feminine indifference, coming back from the window. The rain was not quite so heavy, and their spirits began to rise.

"Here is papa's letter-case with all the introductions. Let us look them over and imagine what sort of people they will be. First of all and foremost," said Grace, "Lord Conway; that is our Minister. He was once at our house—don't you remember, Milly? years and years ago, when he was the Honourable Mr. Something-or-other; at least, I have heard mamma say so——"

"Mamma would be sure to say Something-or-other. Of course, he will come directly and call——"

"And ask us to go and stay there," added Grace seriously, "which would be grander than a hotel; but then one would not be so free to go out and in. I think I will advise papa not to go, or to go only for two or three days, to see how noble people live. To be sure," she added, "if he is not married—I wonder if he is married?—he could not ask us; unless he has a mother, or sister, or something, to keep his house."

"He is sure to be married," said Milly, "if it is so long since he was in Canada—longer than we can recollect; and a Minister too—he must be quite old!"

"On the contrary, the Minister for the Colonies is often quite young, I believe," said Grace. What she founded this opinion upon we are unable to state, but it was Grace's peculiarity that she liked to be wiser than her neighbours. "Put Lord Conway on one side. Now there is Sir John Didcot. He is married; there is not any doubt about that. Don't you remember *him*, Milly?—a fat man

who had to do with railways. He was dreadfully rich. I should think very likely they live in the country, and would ask us for—Easter, or that sort of thing. Everybody in London goes out of town for Easter. There are several national solemnities of that kind, you know," said Grace half satirically, half complacently. "Easter, and the Derby-day, and the 12th of August, and a few more."

"What do people do on the 12th of August? But we shall be back home," said Milly, "before that, shan't we? How nice it will be to get back home. I will make papa buy loads of presents—presents for everybody. I was thinking only to-day what Lenny would like, and old John."

"It is rather too soon to think of presents for home, considering we only arrived yesterday," said Grace: and then she, too, breathed a small sigh, thinking of the bright room at home with all the boys laughing and questioning, and the tables covered with the presents they would carry back, and the baby, the darling of the whole house, seated triumphant in the midst of them, the fairy distributer of all these riches. Though it had been such a great thing to come to England—though it was such an ecstasy to be in England—yet, after all, home was a different matter. She gave a glance round this inn parlour, and smothered another little sigh.

"I suppose we shall have to go to the Didcots," she said, "sooner or later. Oh, after that here is something delightful! Mr. Rivers, the author—you know. Of course, he will ask all the best people to meet papa. That will be far the most interesting of all. Fancy, perhaps we shall see Tennyson!" Grace raised a pair of great brown eyes opened wide with awe and rapture. "I wonder how one ought to behave one's self to a great poet. I should like to go down on my knees and kiss his hand."

"Ladies never go down on their knees—except to the Queen," said Milly, rousing up. "I wonder if we shall be asked to Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace, or any of those places! It would be nice to know the princesses, don't you think?"

"We ought to be," said Grace sedately, "for papa had so much to do for the Prince of Wales. Oh!" cried the loyal colonial maiden, clasping her hands, "do you think the Princess will ask us, Milly? He will tell her, of course, who we are. That beautiful, beautiful creature! I don't know which of the two would be most delightful—the Princess or Tennyson. One would have to call him *Mr.* Tennyson, as if he were nobody," she added with a plaintive tone; "but to the Princess one would say Madam, or Your Royal Highness."

"Cissy Nunn told me you only said Ma'am."

"Cissy Nunn had no manners," said Grace. "I like titles; they are so pretty. Everybody that is beautiful, or delightful, or has genius should have some beautiful title. Princess!—that is what I should like to call her; but I suppose you can only do that when you are intimate—and I am afraid, with so many people as she must have to see, *that's* not very likely," the girl said regretfully.

Thus they went on talking the greatest nonsense in the world without suspecting it. The Yorkes were persons of importance at home. Whenever a great personage from England appeared he was received with all the resources of their simple and graceful, but by no means magnificent, hospitality. The distinguished visitors accepted all these little attentions cheerfully. They were the best to be had in the place, and they were characteristic of it, and amused the wandering peers and lions as much as if their hosts had been lions also, or peers. But it need not be said that the Colonial Secretary was very unlikely to invite the Yorkes to make his house their home, though that was how they had treated him; and that even the most amiable of princesses would not feel herself bound to invite, nor her august spouse even to recollect the name of the good colonial people who had been altogether at his service. Nay, we doubt much if the author would have felt himself bound to assemble a literary party for the admiration of the Canadian family. The simplicity of the girls considered all these natural returns of their hospitality not only as natural, but inevitable, though some doubts on the subject of the Princess did cross their minds. Still they could not help thinking an invitation was at least possible. These anticipations kept them amused, and made them forget the passage of time. The bland waiter came up to the door, and looked in more than once. Finally he entered, and suggested respectfully that it would be better to have dinner up. Then they looked at each other blankly, relapsing all at once into alarm and gloom.

"Perhaps it will be better to have it put upon the table," said Grace, faltering.

"I couldn't eat a morsel," said Milly energetically.

"Oh, hush!" said the elder sister, "most likely the people are angry having to wait so long."

And this argument was too strong to be resisted. They were still a little afraid of making people angry, and loved to please everybody they were brought in contact with. Then came the soup, cold, which they tried to swallow; then a terrible soaked rag of fish. But the next moment Mr. Yorke himself walked in. He told the girls hastily that he had been caught in the rain—that he had been out in a suburb, where cabs were not to be got easily, and that he was so wet and it was so late that he would go to bed at once and have something brought to him to his room. This was a climax to the discomfort of the evening. They sent away the joint notwithstanding the almost tears of the waiter. "Oh, what do we care for dinner!" the girls cried. They had been warned when they left home that, above all things, they were to see that their father did not catch cold.

"Mamma will think it is our fault," said Milly with quivering lips. Who had ever heard of papa going to bed unless he were very, very ill? Even Grace, though she had so much strength of mind, could scarcely keep from crying. "Oh, how I wish we had never left home!" she said. "Oh, if mamma were only here!" said Milly. Left to their own resources, they could think of nothing but a longing, useless appeal to the one authority. Mamma would know what should be done in such an emergency. She would understand at a glance the position of affairs, and whether he might safely be left alone, or what should be done for him. The girls knew that he was a very difficult patient, and that nobody but their mother could persuade him to attend to himself. It was a terrible problem for them so soon, before they had even awoke to the possibility of such an accident; for who ever thought of papa falling ill? it had been the thing against which no precaution had been taken. The girls had a little medicine chest full of Mrs. Yorke's domestic preservatives, and had received the minutest directions respecting their own health—but papa! "Take care your father does not catch cold," she had said, but that was all. He had always been subject to bad colds. "But what could we do?" Grace asked of herself unconsciously, hearing her mother's warnings in her ears. After a while she ventured to go to his room to see if anything could be done. Mr. Yorke had not gone to bed; he was sitting by a fire which smoked a little, in his dressing-gown, with a steaming glass of brandy-and-water by his side. He did not send away the girls, who floated into his room with a doubtful air, keeping close together like a pair of doves; but he looked up with restrained impatience from some letters he was reading. "What is it?" he said. Oh, not crossly—not at all crossly! they said afterwards; but keeping from being cross with an effort. The letters he was reading were old letters. Some lying on the table before him did not seem even to have been opened. He threw his handkerchief over them as the girls came in. "What is it?" Clearly he had found something which was of more interest to him than anything they could do or say.

"I hope you have had something to eat, papa," said Grace.

"I don't want anything to eat. I am taking this by way of precaution," he said.

"But you ought to eat. There is some mutton; it is quite hot still. May I ring and ask the waiter?"

"Don't take any trouble about me. Don't you think I am old enough to look after myself?"

Grace did not know what to do. Her mamma, as she felt certain, and as Milly immediately suggested when they left the room, would have asked no questions; she would have had a tray brought in quite noiselessly without saying a word, and made him eat something. "Why didn't you run, then, and bring the tray if you knew that was the right thing?" Grace asked afterwards, aggrieved, but Milly had not the courage to take any initiative.

They stood for two or three moments more, looking at him with an anxiety that was altogether helpless.

"Is your cold in your head, papa? Is it in your chest? Have you got a cough? Do you feel any pain? Shall I bring you some lozenges?"

Poor Grace! she was cudgelling her brain to know what to do; but to ask questions was just the thing she was never to do. In the flurry and agitation of her feelings she forgot that.

"There is nothing the matter with me," said Mr. Yorke. "I have got a little cold; that is all; not to-night; I felt it when we landed. Go to bed. You must be tired too."

"But, papa——" said Grace, gazing at him anxiously, but sadly helpless.

He had the air of a man interrupted in something much more interesting than their girlish talk. A little pucker of impatience gathered in his forehead; he was too serious to smile, and there was a flush on his face,

and he was very hoarse, looking exactly as he did when he caught one of his *worst* colds.

"Well," he said almost harshly, "have you anything particular to say? If not, you see I am busy. I should prefer to be left alone."

Grace's anxious eyes were surveying him from head to foot. Milly, behind, plucked at her sleeve, meaning to convey some suggestion which she could not put into words. They wanted to do something—anything: but neither of them had the least idea what. Milly, who thus tried to prick her sister into exertion, was still more destitute of any perception what to do than Grace was.

"Good night then, papa," said Grace slowly. She stooped over him to kiss him; and, oh, how hot his head was! One of his worst colds! and nobody here who knew exactly what to do.

"Good night," he said quickly. He gave a little sigh of relief as they went away and turned back to the papers which he had hastily concealed. The girls saw this and it did not console them. They went back much depressed to the sitting-room, which had never been very bright, and which now was doleful beyond measure. And this was their first night! Hearing, however, a furtive sob from Milly, Grace turned round upon her quite suddenly, and "snapped her up."

"Well!" she cried, "after all, it is not anything so very dreadful; papa has a cold; he has often had a cold before. He is busy with something. I don't see why you should make a fuss about it. I dare say he had something to eat when he was out. An old friend would be sure to offer him something. Of course, he will be better to-morrow. We had better take his advice and go to bed."

Now Milly began to cry in earnest. "We did not come to England all this long way," she said, half miserable, half indignant, "only to go to bed."

At which, though she was not much happier than Milly, Grace laughed. "Of course," she said, "you little goose, the first thing we do everywhere is always to go to bed. We must do that. You may live without going to the theatre." Grace added philosophically, with a little sigh, "without going into society—but not without going to bed."

Nevertheless it was forlorn to be able to think at nine o'clock of no other way of spending the evening. They occupied a little of the vacant time by ordering tea, for the spoiled dinner had not tempted them; and then sadly enough they put back the letters of introduction into the letter-case. It seemed less probable now somehow, they could not tell how, that the Princess would take any notice of them, or that Lord Conway would carry them off to his house. They put away those passports to society, through which they had seemed to have a momentary glimpse of everything that was splendid. As they did so a little piece of paper fell out. Milly took it up and read it first; then Grace came and looked over her shoulder. It was very inoffensive and unimportant in appearance—a simple address, 3, Grove Road, Hampstead, written in their father's hand. He had sent, they recollected, for the Directory and taken an address out of it that morning. Could this be where he had been visiting—the suburb in which he had not been able to get a cab? A slight tremor ran over them, a sense of mystery which could scarcely be called disagreeable. Who could it be who lived at 3, Grove Road, Hampstead? And why had he gone the very first day to call? The girls held their breath. Visions of some old love, far too old to be anything but a memory, came into their minds. They were divided between a little jealousy on their mother's account and a romantic interest about the unknown.

"It is a lifetime since he left England," said Grace with emphasis. Their imaginations leaped into a whole romantic story. They put back the scribbled address into the letter-case with a sort of awe. They had never been so much interested in their father before.

"I wonder who she is," Milly said softly under her breath. "I wonder if we shall ever see her."

"Whoever she is," cried Grace, "and whether we see her or not, you must recollect not a word, not a word to mamma!"

"As if I were such a goose!" cried Milly. "But she must be so old—so old! Mamma would not mind."

This discovery, or supposed discovery, relieved them from the nervous alarm and misery which was beginning to overpower them. After a while they even laughed softly under their breath. Papa's old, old love affair, though it was interesting and even touching as a relic of the ancient ages, was yet more or less amusing too. They put back the scrap of paper along with all the big, imposing letters, which were so much more pretentious, but which it was very evident their father had not been nearly so much interested by. They liked him for going *there* first of all: and then they permitted themselves a little laugh.

"I dare say," said Grace, "they were quite young when they parted. How strange it must be to meet after so many years! One reads of it in books sometimes. I wonder if he will take us to see her. I should think she would like to see us—if she is nice," she added with a little hesitation.

"She must be nice," said Milly, "or he would not have remembered all these years and gone to see her the very first minute. I wonder if mamma would be angry, Grace? I wonder if *she* is married too?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Grace hurriedly. "Men may do that, but not women. You may be sure she has lived all the time—oh, not making herself unhappy—but always faithful! She will be good; she will do all sorts of things for people; but marry—no! I *hope* he will take us to see her. It is like England. It is what I have always thought of England. People are so faithful here. Not changing about, not always looking for something new. I do hope he will take us to see her, Milly."

"I suppose mamma would have no objection," said Milly, her mind somewhat divided on the subject.

They exhausted this new theme looking at it from every side. And at last, much more cheerful—having, indeed, to exercise restraint upon themselves not to chatter too much as they passed their father's door, and perhaps disturb him—they went to bed, no longer thinking it so dismal. This hypothesis, which was built upon so slight a foundation, was on the whole the most amusing and the most interesting suggestion that had ever yet entered their minds in respect to papa.

CHAPTER IV.

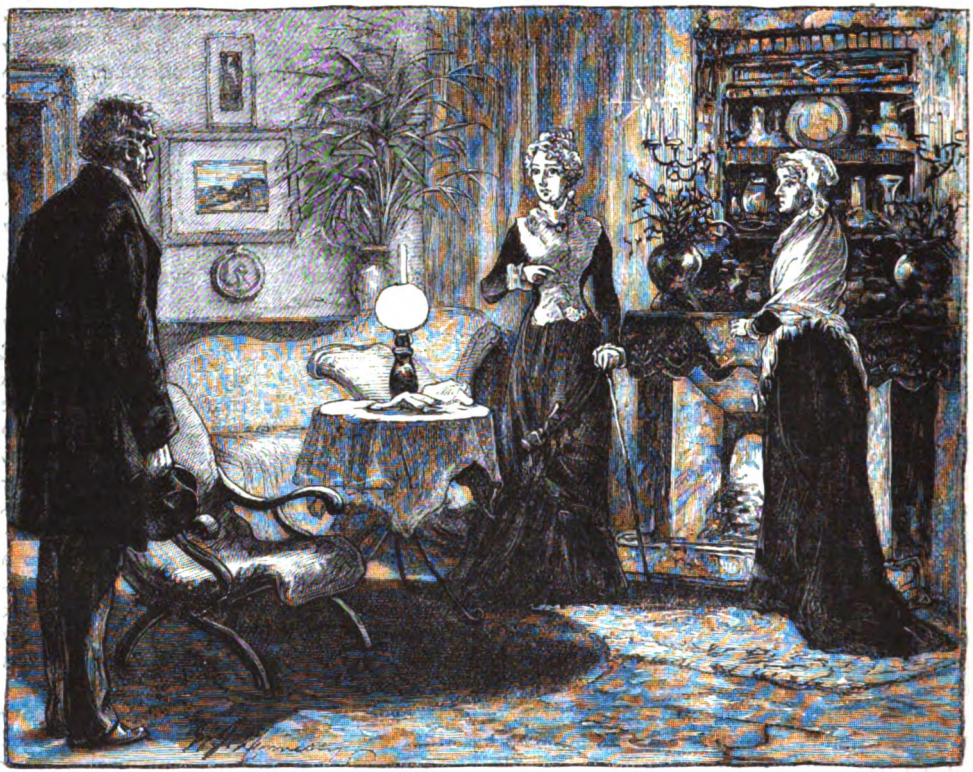
ROBERT YORKE had gone to Canada about thirty years before the beginning of this history. He was then a robust young man of about twenty-five, a great athlete, and bringing from "home" all that science in cricket and other cognate sports which people out there are proud to think is the inheritance of every Englishman. He had begun in a very humble way, without introductions or recommendations of any sort—a thing which made the first steps of his course both slow and difficult; but he was a young fellow of extraordinary resolution and self-control, and there is no disadvantage in the world which will stand against those qualities. He made his way slowly, but very surely, working upward from the lowest grade. He was a man whom people could not fail to note wherever he went, a man who was loved and hated, or at least vehemently disliked: the mild approval of indifference never was his. Perhaps it might even be said that the majority of people disliked the man. He was not conciliatory. He was very silent, very reserved, so reserved that his wife even knew nothing about him, where he came from, who were his relations, or if he had any. On the other side of the Atlantic a man is permitted to be the son of his own actions. Where there are so many new people there are not the same researches into the antecedents of a candidate for social acceptance, which are common among us. He did not belong to a Canadian family, but was entirely a new man; and he was not inquired into. Any rash person who attempted to do so made little by his motion. Such anxious inquirers as ventured to put the question to him, whether he belonged to the Yorkes of Hardwicke, or any other great family of the name, were met with a stern and simple negative which made an end of them. "No," he would say, with a perfectly blank countenance, and remain silent, defying further inquiry. When a man is married, then is the moment for investigations; but though Yorke married into a very good family, a family which had been settled in Canada for at least three generations—which is something like coming in with the Conqueror—he would seem to have successfully resisted all attempts to make him give an account of himself. He said shortly that he had "no relations" to the inquiries of his parents-in-law. It is not to be denied that they disliked this at first; but finding that no better was to be made of it, they reflected that it was rather a recommendation to a husband in some cases, and permitted the marriage. Mrs. Yorke was about ten years younger than her husband, still a pretty woman, as she had a good right to be, having had neither cares nor troubles to deepen the genial lines, or engrave a single wrinkle on her pleasant countenance. She had never been required to think of anything beyond the needs of her household. Her mind was as fresh as her face. Though she was a great authority to her children, and knew exactly what to do in household emergencies, and how to take care of them all when anything was the matter with them—and even how to manage her husband when he had one of his bad colds—she had never had any harder intercourse with life. All went smoothly with her in its bigger affairs. She had everything that heart could desire—according to her position in life, her friends

said. That position was very different in Canada from what it would have been at home. Here, in this old island, we ordinary folks, who modestly call ourselves ladies and gentlemen without aspiring to rank, are quite aware that we are out of the way of Princes and Princesses, and Secretaries of State. When we go to London, even if we may have arranged a royal entry into our special burgh, or been "of use" to a wandering Prince, it never occurs to us that the Princess will have heard of our arrival in town, and will forthwith ask us to tea. But on the other side of the Atlantic things are different, and to be in the best society, to be in the way of meeting, and even entertaining all the illustrious wanderers of the earth, it is not necessary to be rich. Your position in life does not depend upon money, but upon many things that are little enough taken into account in more formal society—upon energy and civic services, and even sometimes upon that faculty of keeping in the front of affairs which many people who have no other merit possess, and which tells everywhere, more or less. The Yorkes were not overwhelmingly rich. He had not made a colossal fortune; but, on the other hand, his expenses were moderate. And without living at all splendidly, or with any ostentation of wealth, it was recognised that they were to be reckoned among the best people. They lived that kind of life which to many people appears, or did once appear, an ideal existence—a life of domestic comfort, of homely wealth, and family companionship; in which Cowper's picture of the close-drawn curtains, the blazing fire, the hissing tea-urn was realised continually, with all the warm family adoration and mutual knowledge, and also, perhaps, something of the narrowness and sense of superior virtue which that ideal implies. The Yorkes living thus quite simply and domestically, parents and children together, had a position which people possessing six times their income, and living ten times as expensively, would not have had in England. They kept no more than one homely little carriage of all work, and were served indoors by maidservants; but, notwithstanding, they were among "the best people," and were not afraid to offer their simple hospitality, in happy ignorance of its want of splendour, to all the strangers who pleased them, and sometimes, among these, to very great people indeed.

While their children were young it had been several times proposed that Mr. and Mrs. Yorke should go "home" on a visit, to see England, and the ways of the old world. Mrs. Yorke in particular, who had never been in England in her life, had been much excited by the idea of going "home;" but many things came in the way. Sometimes the drawback was on her side, in the shape of babies, or other natural impediments of a young mother's career; and sometimes on his, in claims of business. Indeed, it had been generally remarked by all the friends of the family that Yorke himself never showed any great inclination to go home. After it had all been settled over and over again that they were to go, it came to be a foregone conclusion with all observers that something would certainly come in the way, and that they would never go. Yet nobody could say that Yorke was to blame; the accidents that detained and deterred them were perfectly natural, and so far as could be seen, quite unavoidable. After the two elder girls grew up matters became more pressing, for while Mrs. Yorke with her children always on her mind very easily accepted any excuse for giving up an expedition which must have carried her away from them, Grace and Milly had no such detaining influence, and clamoured for the tour in which they themselves were to have a share.

What it was which at last decided their father to this journey, nobody knew. He was no more explanatory upon this matter than upon so many others. All he did was to announce one evening, coming back from his business, that he thought if they could get ready to start by next mail that he really would be able to go. There was reality, and there was meaning in his tone. This time nobody said, "You shall see: nothing will come of it." From the very beginning everything was different. He went at once and inquired about berths in the steamers; he inquired after the outfits, the preparations which the ladies had to make, warning them that they could get all the new fashions in London, "or in Paris," he added, seeing the smile of scorn upon the girls' faces. But by this time Mrs. Yorke had become more reluctant than ever to leave her little children, and encounter all the troubles of a long voyage. She had grown a little stout, not more than was becoming, all her friends said, though people who did not take any interest in her good looks used a stronger expression; and with this increased fulness there had come an increased disinclination to budge. She made a thousand excuses. Reginald was a little delicate. Lenny was just at that crisis in his education when, if he was not kept up to his work,

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"Come in, come in," she said, "whoever you are."—Page 7.

something dreadful might happen. ("And mamma thinks she can keep him up to his work!" the girls said aside, with incredulous laughter; for, indeed, she was always the first to find out that he had a headache, and that health was of far more importance than any examination.) Then little Mary, the baby, had not yet got all her teeth. "And how a woman could find it in her heart to leave a baby teething—when everybody knows convulsions may come on at any moment," Mrs. Yorke protested she did not know. The end was that two days before the day of sailing, she announced point-blank that it was impossible. She could not do it. Home! why this was home, where they had all been born. She was very glad that the girls should go, who had the energy: but she had not the energy; and the little ones wanted her. All the bystanders, breaking out into accustomed smiles, declared that they knew it from the beginning. When it was not one thing it was another. When it was not Robert Yorke who could not leave his office, it was Louisa who could not leave her nursery—everybody knew from the beginning that they never would go.

But this conclusion, though so often justified, was not infallible. On hearing, in an outburst of despair from the girls, mamma's resolution, Mr. Yorke stood stoutly to his colours. It was very unfortunate that mamma should feel so, but whether or not, he must push forward, he said; he must go. He even said something about business to Grace and Milly, in respect to which they could not believe their ears. And Mrs. Yorke was very thankful to consent to the compromise. She was not of an anxious mind; everything had gone well in her family; there had been no losses, no accidents; there was no tradition of misfortune in the household, such as chills the hearts of some; and she saw them go with a cheerful countenance. The wind blew rather strong that first night, nothing to hurt, only a quarter of a gale; and she shuddered, and was thankful she was not with them. "Robert is an excellent sailor, and the girls are

young. They were never at sea before; they will take pleasure in being a little ill as a new experience. But I cannot bear it, it puts me out altogether. I am thankful I am not with them," she said; and so settled herself quite quietly with her nursery tea-party to wait till the travellers should return; which would be "such an amusement."

This is how it happened that Mr. Yorke and his daughters came to England without her. The girls lamented her withdrawal loudly; but Yorke himself said little. He made a half confidence to her the evening before they left. "To tell the truth," he said, "it is something I saw in the English papers that decided me, something about some property."

"What property?" said Mrs. Yorke, to whom, as she had six children, the question of property was by no means uninteresting; but he only said, "It may come to nothing. I will tell you all about it when I come back." She had curiosity enough after he was gone to send to the office for the old newspapers, and to examine them carefully to see if she could find any clue to this mysterious speech; but she could not. And she was an easy-going soul, and found it not the least impossible to wait for the information until he should come home.

Thus the father and daughters crossed the Atlantic, justifying her easy confidence in the invariable good fortune of the family by having a most prosperous voyage. And nothing could be more bright than the cheerful assault with which the two girls on that first morning took possession of London and all its associations. They had a delightful morning, but not a very cheerful night. As, however, the girls were both alive to the thought that a cold generally ("very often," said Milly; "almost always," cried Grace, more confidently still) goes off, when proper precautions are taken, in the night, they consoled themselves. To-morrow is always a new day.

CHAPTER V.

THE girls knew nothing more till next morning. There was no reason why they should be alarmed. After all a cold is no such great matter. When they went to bed they went to sleep, as is natural at their age, and heard nothing more till they were up and dressed, having almost forgotten their father's illness altogether. Before, however, they were quite ready to leave their room, something occurred which startled them greatly. There was a knock at the door, in which of itself there was an alarming sound. Mystery and meaning were in it far beyond the sound of an ordinary knock. When one of them rushed to open it, a woman came in of imposing appearance. She did not speak to them at the door, as the servants of the hotel did, but came in, and closed the door behind her. Importance was in her look, in her rustling silk dress and lofty cap, in her soft and almost stately step.

"My dear young ladies," she said, "you must not be alarmed;" and with this came in, and with her hand behind her shut the door. Naturally the girls' imagination immediately leapt at things terrible — bad news from Canada, a summons home.

"What is the matter? Is it a telegram?" they cried with one breath.

"Oh, no, it is no telegram; fortunately, the poor gentleman is in his own comfortable room, where he will be seen to as comfortably as if he were at home. He said you were not to be alarmed."

"We are thoroughly alarmed now," said Grace; "tell us the truth at once."

"Your poor papa, my dear young ladies, is very poorly," said their visitor. "I am the manageress of this hotel. He rang his bell in the night, and we sent for a doctor; everything has been done that could have been done. I made the mustard with my own hands for his poultice. We are always ready in our great way of business for everything that can be required. I had the Foil de Rigolette ready, but he preferred mustard. Everything was done that could be done."

The two girls instinctively had drawn together, and caught each other by the arm in mutual support. "Oh, tell us, tell us," they cried; "is papa——" and then their lips refused to fashion the other dreadful word that leapt to them. The manageress was satisfied with the effect she had produced. Instead of the fresh and cheerful girls upon whom she had intruded herself, two woe-begone and colourless ghosts stood before her trembling with dismay and terror.

Then she nodded her head encouragingly. "A little better—yes, a little better. We have made as much progress, the medical gentleman says, as can be expected in such a sharp attack. Mustard chest and back have eased the breathing, and though he does not wish it to be concealed from you that it is a very sharp attack——"

Milly dropped her sister's arm, and, sinking down upon a chair, fell a-weeping in mingled excitement and terror and relief. Grace stood still, holding by the table for support, very pale, and with trembling lips.

"You have not told us what it is. He had a bad cold."

"That is how it always begins," said the manageress; "but you will have the consolation of knowing that it has been taken in time, and that everything has been done. I was called up at once, and I have given him my best attention. I always say I am half a doctor myself. Yes, it is congestion of the lungs; but you must not be alarmed—indeed you must not be alarmed, my dear young ladies; there's no reason to suppose that he won't recover——"

"Recover!" they both cried together like a lamentable echo, turning towards her four beseeching eyes, as if she held in her hand the issues of fate.

"And do well—and do well," she said hastily. "That's what I meant. Go and take some breakfast, and fortify yourselves like good dears; and when the doctor comes, we'll see. You can ask him; and if the sight of you wouldn't agitate your poor papa——"

Why should it agitate him? Why should it not be the most natural thing in the world to see them by his bedside? That this should not have been his first thought was beyond measure extraordinary to the girls; but they yielded to the wonderful, appalling argument after a little. If it would agitate him, if it might hurt him, whatever it might cost them, they must stay away. There could not be any question about that. After a while they went, sick-hearted and miserable, into the sitting-room where their breakfast was laid, and where, the one persuading the other, they swallowed each a cup of tea. Then they sat down to wait the coming of the doctor. They had a long time to wait. It was a bright morning after the rain, and they sat at the window and watched all the comings and goings in the dingy London street. Opposite to them was a tall house with a balcony filling up all the horizon; and the tradesmen's carts jostled up and down for an hour or two, and lugubrious organ-grinders stopped underneath encouraged by the sight of the two faces, possible listeners, which appeared at their window. And then the first of the morning passed, and hansom cabs began to rattle about, depositing, with loud clang and hum, now young men and now old, at the different doors; and the stream of passers-by quickened; and postmen and telegraph boys came and went with sharp rattles of knocking; and quick footsteps beating up and down the street. The girls were not always at the window: now one, now another would go to the door of the sick-room and listen to the sounds inside. And sometimes the door would be opened, and something asked for, which Grace or Milly, far more rapid than any waiter, would rush to get. "Just the same, just the same," was all the nurse could say to them. They began to feel as if they were entirely dependent upon this woman, and that in her hand was the decision of all.

When the doctor appeared at last he was so rapid and so hurried that it was all they could do to get him to pause to speak to them as he left the room. "No better; but I did not expect it," he said. "No worse: these things must take their course."

"But we are his daughters," cried Grace. "Is it possible that you will shut us out from his bedside? Whenever he has been ill, we have always nursed him. Oh, why must we be kept out now?"

"Always nursed him?" said the doctor; "that is well thought of. Step in here. Do you mean to say that he has had this before?"

"What is it?" said Grace. "He has had bad colds, very bad colds. Mamma was always anxious when he had one of his colds."

"And mamma told us above all things that we must not allow him to catch cold," cried Milly. "Oh, how badly we must have managed! but how could we know? and what could we do? And it was only the second night."

The doctor was quickwitted and sympathetic; but naturally he thought of his patient as a case, and not as a man. "Not to allow him to catch cold! that's easier said than done," he said with a half-smile, shaking his head. "I thought there must be delicacy of the chest to begin with; all that could not have been done in one day."

"No, no, there was no delicacy; he was always well and strong—always strong," the girls cried, emulating and supplementing each other. They poured upon him instantly a hundred instances of their father's robustness. He had never been ill in his life, except with a cold, and everybody has colds. He never took any special care. Mamma was anxious, but then mamma was always anxious about us all, though we are known to be the healthiest family! To all these eager explanations Doctor Brewer listened with that half-smile, shaking his head; but he was interested. From looking at this matter as only a case, he began to realise the human creatures involved in it, and to perceive that the man who was ill was the head of an anxious, probably dependent family, and that these two pale, frightened, eager girls, with their young beauty all obscured by this cloud of pale

terror and confusion, were his children. He began to look at them with a certain tenderness of pity.

"You are very young," he said at last, when they gave him time to speak. "I think you had better telegraph at once for your mother."

"For mamma?" their faces were pale before, but this suggestion withdrew from them every tinge of colour.

"She is the best nurse he can have; she ought to be here to take care of you in any case. Give me her address, and I will telegraph. She ought to know at once."

"Doctor!" said Grace, separating herself from her sister, "oh, let *us* know at once. Is it so serious; is it dangerous? I am not very young, and I am the oldest, and have had a great deal of experience. Mamma could not be here for nearly a fortnight; and think what a thing it would be, the long voyage alone, and the fear of what she might find when she came, and no news—no news for ten days or more—for she might not have so good a passage as we had. And then she has never been used to travel, or do anything by herself. Oh, doctor, do you think—do you think that it is so serious as that?"

"Where is your mother?" he said.

"In Canada," they both cried in one breath.

Dr. Brewer began to be more interested than was at all justifiable in what was after all only one case out of a hundred. "Poor children! poor children!" he said. They stood with their faces intent upon him, four great brown eyes, with the eyelids curved and puckered over them in deep arches of anxiety and terror, appealing as if to a god who could kill and make alive. He was overcome by this passionate trouble and suspense. He put out his hand (he had children of his own) and touched lightly with a soothing touch the nearest shoulder. "You must not be frightened," he said. "I see you are brave girls; you will do your duty. No; if she is so far away as that, we will not frighten your mother to-day—not to-day."

"You think he is very ill?" they said, searching his face as if it were full of secret folds and hieroglyphics which searching could find out.

"He has a sharp attack. Come, one of you shall go, one at a time, and be at hand if anything is wanted. I sent him a nurse last night, whom I happened to be able to lay my hand upon. She will want a rest occasionally. If you will obey orders exactly, and call her whenever you are at a loss—one at a time."

"Milly is not strong—not so very strong," cried Grace; "let it be me. I nursed them all when we had scarlet fever: and I never cry nor break down."

"Oh, Grace! I should not cry if I were with papa," cried Milly, with streaming eyes.

Dr. Brewer almost cried too. He was tender-hearted, as so many doctors are, and then he had girls of his own. But he could not spend all his morning with these two pretty forlorn creatures, and their father, who was struggling for his life.

This went on for more than a week, during which there was to these poor girls neither night nor day, but all one confused languor and excitement, and anxiety; the monotony of the sick-room broken only by now and then a terrified consultation with nurse and doctor, or between themselves, as to what was to be done. During all this time they defended their mother from the telegram with which the doctor had threatened her. The more they thought of it the more impossible it seemed that she should be summoned upon such a journey at a moment's notice and kept, during all its course, in the terrible anxiety which was inevitable if once she knew what was hanging over them. After the first days Dr. Brewer himself did not urge this. He said to himself that all would be settled one way or the other before the poor woman could come, and that the girls, poor things! must bear it as they could if matters came to the worst.

Meanwhile, as the dreary days went on, the sick-room, in its stillness and monotony, became the scene of one of those hand-to-hand struggles with death in which there is all the terrible force of a tragedy to those who are aware of the conclusion which is drawing nigh; but it is seldom that the persons who are most interested are aware of this. And Grace and Milly were too young and inexperienced to realise more than that papa was no better from morning to morning, from night to night. There was always one of them in the room with the nurse, and occasionally Mr. Yorke was well enough to talk to them. But either he did not realise the seriousness of his own position, or the torpor of approaching death and the self-absorption of weakness and suffering had begun to steal over him. He liked Grace to do what was needful for him, but smiled at poor little Milly, bidding her run away and amuse herself. "You ought to be doing something. You ought to be taking advantage of your opportunities. Who knows if you will ever be in London again?" he said,

once or twice, with that strange forgetfulness of all the circumstances which bewildered the girls; but either he had nothing important to say, or, in the languor of his illness, he deferred the saying of it, preferring to turn his face to the wall and escape from all consideration of what was coming. Once only this silence was broken; but not to much purpose. He had asked for something to drink; and as Grace raised him—she could do this now as easily as if he had been a child—he caught and was touched by the look of anxiety on her face.

"Poor little Grace!" he said, when he was laid back again upon his pillow, "this is a curious way of enjoying London." He had not much breath to talk, and had to pause between his words.

"Not at all, papa. Yes, it is dreadful for you to have to suffer, but for me quite natural, you being ill."

Then he gave a feeble laugh. "Your mother—will not suppose—that we are engaged like this."

"Milly has written to say you are not well."

"Not well—that was right—not to make her anxious." He laughed a little again. "But she will have to be told—some day—my poor Milly." This was his wife's name as well as his child's.

"Yes, papa, when you are quite well again. She will not mind then; but don't you think that it is best to say little till you are better? for she would be so anxious; and what would be the use of bringing her over, when you will be all right again before she could get here?"

"I shall be all right again," he said, pausing upon each word. The smile had gone off his face. He seemed to weigh the words, and drop them one by one. Was he asking himself whether that would ever be, or only lingering for want of breath? "Remind me," he said, "of the people I went to see—something I want—to tell you about. I can't—be troubled now," and with that he turned once more, as he was so fond of doing, his face to the wall.

Thus the melancholy days went on. Grace had begun to feel something fatal in the air, but Milly had not yet gone farther than the fact that papa was very ill, and that it might be weeks before he was well again, when Dr. Brewer came into their room after his nightly visit. They had been trying to eat something, which they simply acknowledged as a duty but did not know how to get through. Their meals were the most dreadful moments of their day, the only things that marked its melancholy course. The doctor came in, not hurriedly, as he usually did. He drew a chair to the table and sat down beside them. "What are you having—tea? I never told you to take tea," he said.

"It is so easy to take," Milly pleaded, "far easier than anything else."

"In the meantime you must have some wine," he said, ringing the bell; "yes, yes, you must take it whether you like it or not. Now tell me a little about yourselves, as I have some time to myself to-night. My wife was talking of coming to see you. I have never heard anything about your friends in London. It is time to think of looking them up——"

"That means papa is better," said Milly. 'I knew it from the first moment, as soon as I saw the doctor's kind face."

He turned his kind face away from them with a forced smile. He could not bear to meet their anxious eyes.

"But we have no friends—not to call friends," said Grace, who was not quite so sure as Milly, and yet was so glad to take Milly's opinion for this once. "We have letters to quantities of people, and some of them we have seen at home. There is Lord Conway," she said with a little hesitation—"he once stayed at our house. It is a long time ago, but we thought—oh, we did not want him to ask us, especially since papa has been ill. It would be dreadful to have a long illness in a stranger's house."

"Lord Conway!" Dr. Brewer said, bewildered.

"But *we* don't know him," Grace made haste to add; "we don't know any one. They are all people who have been in Canada, or the friends of people who have been in Canada."

The doctor shook his head. "Do you mean that you know nobody, my poor dear children? You have no *friends*—people who really are acquainted with you, who would take a little trouble for you, whom you could have recourse to——" Here he stopped, confused, feeling Grace's eye upon him. "I thought you might have—relations even, on this side of the water," he said.

"Whom we could have recourse to!" said Grace—"oh, doctor, tell us, tell us what you mean! Why should we want to have recourse to any one? That means more than ordinary words——"

"He means—to show us some civility—to show us England—now that papa is going to get better," said Milly, throwing back her head with a pretty movement of pleasure.

But Dr. Brewer did not raise his eyes. He could not face them, the one so anxious to divine his meaning, the other happy in her mistake. Milly was talkative and effusive in her joy. "Now we ought to telegraph to mamma," she cried. "She will have got the first letter saying how ill papa was. It will be delightful to relieve her mind all in a moment — to tell her he is getting well almost as soon as she knew that he was ill. We must telegraph to-morrow first thing."

Dr. Brewer still did not meet Grace's anxious gaze, which would have read his face in a moment. "You are very young," he said, "to have had such a—responsibility upon you. You have been very brave hitherto, and you will not break down now. I am afraid, indeed, that I shall have to telegraph to your mother—very soon now."

It was his tone more than what he said which disturbed Milly in her happy confidence. She turned round suddenly and looked with a sudden inquiry, not at him but at Grace. Grace for her part, trembling, had grasped Dr. Brewer by the arm. "Doctor!" she said in a strange, stifled voice. She could not say any more.

He covered her soft little thin hand with his and patted it gently. "My poor dear children," he said, "my poor children! how can I tell you——" His voice was broken. It told all he had to say without the aid of any words. How could he pain them and put it into words? For a moment it seemed to the doctor as if the man's death must be his fault, and that they would have a right to upbraid him for letting their father die. He sat there with his head drooped and with his heart full of sympathetic anguish, not knowing what might happen next.

Milly gave a great cry. She had not feared all this time, and just now she had been happy and triumphant in the thought that danger was over. She cried out and threw herself suddenly on the ground at the doctor's feet. "Oh, no, no!" she cried. "Oh, don't let it be. Don't let it be! Doctor, think of us poor girls; think of mamma and all the children; doctor, doctor!" said Milly, her voice rising louder and louder in her despair.

Grace had not said anything. She stood, her face all quivering with anguish, her eyes fixed upon him. She seemed to take up the last quivering note of Milly's cry—"Is there no hope?" she said.

The doctor shook his head. He laid his hand tenderly upon poor Milly's hair—every line of his face was working. "Listen to me," he said, his voice trembling. "You have been very courageous, very good hitherto—and now there is one last effort before you. You at least will stand by him to the end. You will not make it worse, but better for him, Grace."

The girl tried to speak two or three times before the words would come. When she found utterance at last what she said was scarcely intelligible. It was, "And Milly too."

"It would be better, far better, that she should lie down and try to rest. I will give her something; but you—you must come with me, Grace."

"And Milly too," the girl said again, as if these were the only words she was capable of. She gathered up her sister from where she lay at the doctor's feet, and whispered to her, smoothing away her disordered hair. Milly was not able to stand. She leaned her weight upon her sister; her pretty hair fell about her face, all wild and distorted with crying. She wanted to get down again to the floor to kneel at the doctor's feet. "He could do something still if he were to try. Oh, Gracie, Gracie! think of us two miserable girls, and mamma, and all the children. He could do something if he were to try."

"Milly! we have got to stand by him—to keep up his heart——"

"I cannot stand—I cannot stand, I think I will die. Oh, doctor, doctor! do something, find out something! Couldn't you do something if you were to try?"

"Milly, am I to go alone—the last time—to papa?"

"Put our blood into him," cried Milly, holding up her small white wrists. "They do that sometimes. Take mine—oh, every drop!—and Gracie's too. Doctor, doctor! you could do something if you were to try."

For weeks after, this cry rang in the good doctor's ears. They both caught at the idea; even Grace, who had command of herself. How easy it seemed!—to take the young blood out of their veins and pour it, like new life, into his. Sometimes it is done in stories—why not, why not, in actual life? Their voices ran into a kind of clamour, imploring him. It was long before the impression made by this scene left the doctor's mind and recollection. Nevertheless, that night both the girls stood by their father's bedside quietly enough, making no scene, watching eagerly for any last word he might have to say to them. But how few of the dying have any last words to say! He opened his eyes, and smiled vaguely twice or thrice, as though all had been quite happy and simple around him—he had gone out of

the region in which anxieties dwell. Perhaps he did not remember that he was leaving them helpless among strangers—or if he knew, the ebb of the wave had caught him and he could feel nothing but the last floating out to sea, the sound of the waters, the tide of the new life.

Left to themselves in such circumstances, the poor girls had no alternative but to be crushed altogether, or to rise into heroic fortitude; and happily Grace had strength enough for that better part. She dressed herself, when the dreadful morning came, in the only black frock her wardrobe contained, with the composure of a creature braced by the worst that could happen, and knowing now that whatever might come, nothing so terrible could fall on her again. The shock, instead of prostrating her as it did her sister, seemed to rally all her forces, and clear and strengthen every faculty. She had scarcely slept, notwithstanding the calming dose which the doctor in his pity had insisted upon administering to both. It procured for poor little Milly some hours of feverish unconsciousness, but with Grace it acted on the mind, not the body, numbing the pain but giving an unnatural and vivid force to all her faculties. Her brain seemed to be beset by thoughts; and first among them was a yearning sympathy and pity for her mother. The sudden shock of a curtly worded telegram would be so novel, so terrible, to that happy woman who never all her life had known what great sorrow was, that her young daughter shuddered at the thought.

As soon as she got up she began to write to her, while Milly still tossed and moaned in her unquiet sleep. Grace's letter was such as no poet, save one of the highest genius, could have written. It was love and not she that composed it. It was a history of all the last days, tender and distinct as a picture. Every word that she said led up to the terrible news at the end, imperceptibly, gradually, as it is the art of tragedy to do, so that the reader should perceive the inevitable and feel it coming without the horror of a sudden shock. When her sister woke she read this letter to her, and they wept over it together. It was almost as new to Milly as it would be to her mother, for she had not realised the slow constant progress of the days to this event, nor even had Grace herself done so, till she had begun to put it down upon paper. When the doctor came in the morning the letter was all ready, put up and addressed; and then it was that Grace insisted no telegram should be sent.

"Mamma has never had any trouble all her life. He always did everything. Nothing dreadful has ever happened to us. The children have been ill, but they always got better. We never were afraid of anything. If this were flung at mamma like a shot—like a blow—it might kill her too."

"Yes, it might kill her too," Milly murmured, turning to the doctor her large strained eyes.

"But, my dear children, somebody must come to you at once; you can't be left here alone. Your mother will be strengthened to bear it as you are, and for your sake. Somebody must come to you at once."

"O Gracie!" murmured Milly, looking at her sister with beseeching eyes.

"Why?" said Grace steadily. "That is just what I cannot see. Nobody could wish mamma to come now. What good would it do? It would be dreadful for her;—and to him—to him!——"

Here, brave as she was, she had to stop, and could not say any more.

"Of course," said the doctor softly, "your father is beyond all need. He is safe now, whatever happens; but you—what can you do? Somebody must come at once to take care of you, to take you home."

Once more Milly's eyes travelled from Grace to the doctor, and back again. To have some one to take care of them sounded to Milly the only thing that was left on earth to desire.

"No one," said Grace, wondering at her own calm, "could be here for a fortnight; and the first days will be the worst. After that things will be easier. Don't you see, everything that can happen will have happened then; and why should some one—for it could not be mamma now, Milly; it would not be mamma—why should some one be disturbed and made uncomfortable, and forced to start at a moment's notice, only to take care of us? I can take care of Milly, and we can go home." Another pause till the tears were swallowed somehow. "It will be less hard, on the whole, to go home by ourselves, than with any one else."

The doctor was struck by this argument. He looked at them anxiously, fragile as they were, looking like shadows of girls after the long anxiety and strain of these ten days.

"Do you think," he said, doubtful, "that you are able for it?"

"Able!" said Grace with the petulance of

grief. "What is there to be able for now? We have borne the worst. If it had been a week ago, and I had known what was coming, I should have said, No, we were not able. But now!" the girl cried with a kind of disdain, "now we have suffered all that can be suffered, doctor. We can never lose our father again."

Here Milly broke out into hysterical cries.

"Oh, papa, papa! Oh, Grace! What shall we do? What shall we do?"

Grace took her sister into her arms standing by the bedside, while the other sat up, her hair hanging about her, her face distraught with a passion of grief over which she had no power. The tears rained from Grace's eyes, but she stood firm as a rock.

"We will bear it," she said; "we will bear it, Milly. We cannot have that to bear again. We will not make it harder for mamma."

This scene upset the kind doctor for the day; he could not give his attention to the other cases which awaited him for thinking of this heart-rending picture. And as for the nurse, whose services were imperatively demanded for another "case"—she could not bear to take leave of them at all, but stole away as if she had been an ill-doer.

"How could any woman with a heart in her bosom leave them in their trouble?" she said, sobbing, to the doctor; "but I am not a woman, I am only a nurse——"

"And there is a life to be preserved," the doctor said. The woman, after all, was only a woman, petulant and unreasonable.

"We are all fools and know nothing. We could not save this life," she said, "though there were no complications."

Dr. Brewer, too, felt a little ashamed. What was the good of him? He had done everything that his science was capable of, but that had been nothing. Old Death, the oldest of practitioners and the most experienced, had laughed at him, and out of his very hands had taken the prey.

The girls never knew what happened till the funeral was over; and yet it troubled them in the midst of their distress that there was nobody to ask to it, no train of mourners to do honour to their father. They went themselves, following the lonely coffin, and the doctor, half ashamed, half astonished at his own emotion, went with them, to see the stranger buried. He had sent the introductory letter to the Colonial Office, accompanied by a statement of the circumstances; but the Minister was up to his eyes in parliamentary work, and his aides knew nothing about Mr. Robert Yorke of Quebec. The landlord, out of respect for what had happened in his own house—though at first he had been very angry that any one should have taken such a liberty as to die in his house at the beginning of the season—followed at a little distance. He came by himself in the second mourning coach which the undertakers felt to be necessary, and in which it was well there should be some one for the sake of respectability. Notwithstanding all that had been said and done, it did not seem to the girls that they had ever realised what had happened till they came back that dreary afternoon, and sat down hand in hand in their sitting-room, the door closed upon all things, the murk evening closing in, and nothing to look forward to now—nothing to think of but their own desolation. They "broke down;" what could they do else? But when there are two to break down, it is inevitable that one of the two must see the vanity of tears and make an effort to check them.

"We cannot go on like this," Grace said. "We will only kill ourselves too; that will not be any comfort for mamma. In the first place, we must find out whether there was anything that—papa wanted done while he was in England. So I mean to talk of him," she said, "just as if he were in Canada, as if he were next door; he must not be banished from his own because he is dead. Mamma will never let him be forgotten and put aside. We must accustom ourselves to talk about him. Perhaps there was something he wanted done. Do you recollect that he went away by himself that night?"

"Oh, Gracie," cried her sister, "whoever they are, I hate those people. They were the cause of it. He would never have caught cold but for——"

"Hush," said Grace, "we must not hate anybody. I should like to go and ask about them; they must have been old—friends."

It was at this moment that the waiter came in—the waiter who had always been so kind to them. He came in with a countenance regulated to the occasion.

"Young ladies," he said, "here's a gentleman below inquiring for a party as has come from Canada. It's not a name as ever I heard before. Mr. Crosthwaite, he's asking for. I said as I did not like to disturb you such a day; but if so be as you might have heard speak of the name—from Canada."

Grief is irritable, and Grace turned upon the questioner with quick resentment. "Oh, how can you come and ask *us?*" she cried.

"Is there nobody in your house to be disturbed but my sister and me?"

"I beg your pardon, miss," said the waiter, "I hope I'm not unfeeling. Nobody could have felt more—if it ain't disrespectful to say so—according to their station in life. If it hadn't a been that the manageress is that cantankerous about a death in the house I'd have followed the poor gentleman willingly to his last 'ome, and never grudged no trouble; but when a gentleman comes to me and asks for a party as arrived from Canada a fortnight ago——"

The two girls looked at each other. An incident of any kind to relieve the dreary monotony was welcome. They were not able to see any one—this they would have said steadfastly, and believed, the decorum of their sorrow requiring it; but they were not less young because they were in trouble so profound, and anything that broke it a little was a help. "Arrived from Canada—a fortnight ago;" it seemed years—but they gulped down that thought. "We did so, you know," said Grace, "but that is not our name. I know no one of that name. Did you say——?"

"I told him all as had happened, miss," said the sympathetic waiter who brought the message, "and the gentleman was very sorry. He's a feeling gentleman, whoever he is. He said, 'Poor young ladies!' as feeling as I could have done it myself; but he's very anxious about this Crosthwaite, or whatever it is. I said you was very considerate, and that if you could help him I made sure I might ask you. He would have liked to speak to any one as was from Canada," the waiter said.

Again the girls looked at each other. Any one from Canada! Perhaps, though they did not know any Crosthwaites, they might know the gentleman who was inquiring for them; and even the sight of some one from home would be a kind of consolation. Grace, with a look, consulted Milly, who had no counsel to give, but only appealed back again to Grace with her beautiful eyes. Then the elder sister said, tremblingly, "We are not fit to see any one; but if he thinks it will help him you may let him come up-stairs." She said this with a sigh of what she felt to be extreme reluctance; and yet there was a kind of consoled sensation in her mind too, which was taken off the strain to which it had been continuously subjected so long, by a new thought.

The waiter stared a little, for this he had not expected—and said something to himself about American young ladies, though very nice, not being like English young ladies. In a minute or two he came back and introduced the stranger. The girls were sitting together at one side of the table, two faint candles throwing a white light upon each white face. They looked small and young, almost childish, in their black dresses, and there was an anxious look upon the two little wan girlish countenances. The stranger came in with some diffidence. They could scarcely make out his face, but they saw at once that it was somebody unknown; and the look of expectation faded at once out of their eyes. They looked at each other with a piteous mutual disappointment.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I fear this is an intrusion for which there is no excuse. I was seeking a gentleman who has been long in Canada—Leonard Crosthwaite was his name."

"We never heard the name," said Grace. "We are very sorry. We came from Quebec. Canada is a large place. It might be in another part."

"He had been a very long time out of England. He came back only a few weeks ago. We were sure—we thought we were sure—that he came to this hotel."

The girls both shook their heads. "If there had been any other Canadian person here we must have heard. They would have come to us," said Grace, with a sob only half concealed.

"It is very important," said the young man. "There is property concerned, and the comfort of several people. Everybody thought he was dead. It will upset the arrangements of a family, and make those poor who were well off," he said in an undertone, to himself, rather than to them.

The girls looked at him with interest. There seemed a story involved, and that gave them a sensation that, if not pleasure, was, at least, relief from the pressure of their own continuously painful thoughts. Milly even ventured a little "Oh!" of wistful interest. Then he went on hastily—

"Pardon. I ought not to disturb you. You can give me no clue? This gentleman must have arrived about the same time that I hear you did. I know—I know how painfully your time has been occupied. I am ashamed to trouble you, but if you could give me any clue——"

"We never heard the name," said Grace. "We could write home and ask, but that would not be of much use. We are going back," she added with an explanatoriness

which perhaps was not necessary, "as soon as——" But here her little strength broke down, and she could not say any more.

"I beg your pardon, I beg a thousand pardons," the young man cried. "Forgive me for intruding upon you." And he turned with a respectful bow, and opened the door; but when he had done this he turned again and looked at them once more. "You will excuse me," he said in a voice which was full of emotion, "but I have a mother. If she could be of any use to you——"

Here the girls, being so weeping-ripe, again lost their self-control altogether. Milly began to sob audibly, throwing herself upon her sister's shoulder, and the tears dropped heavily one by one from Grace's eyes. She put one arm round poor Milly, and turned,



"Put our blood into him," cried Milly.—Page 21.

with a tremulous smile through her tears, to the stranger.

"Thank you for being so kind," she said. "You are very kind; but we are not quite so miserable as perhaps you think. We have got our mother too. We are waiting till she tells us what to do."

He said nothing but "Oh!" and stood for a moment uncertain, not knowing what to say. But what could a stranger say? He was obliged to turn again and go away, after a great many fumblings with the door.

Next morning they began, sadly, the necessary work of putting away their father's papers and his little personal possessions. In his writing-book there was a letter half written to their mother, which they put aside carefully as a sacred thing, not looking, for love, at his

last words. But on one of the pages of the blotting-book they found once more the address which had excited their curiosity before, "3, Grove Road, Hampstead," written obliquely across the page. It was repeated on a scrap of paper which marked his place in the book which they remembered he had been reading, and on which, besides, there were some jottings of dates and names which they did not understand. These were—"Left July 45 —— U. A. died 55 —— due with interest for 20 years—— but forgiven——." The word "interest" discouraged the girls; it must be something about business, they thought. This perpetually recurring address, however, bewildered them. They went on with their sad occupation without saying much to each other, but when they sat down to rest and to take the food which their youthful appetites began to demand, notwithstanding their trouble, Grace suddenly broke the silence.

"It must be some old friend, who lives there," she said.

Milly made no reply in words, but she looked up with instant response and comprehension.

"I think," said Grace, "we ought to go and see who it is. It might be a relation. It might be some one who would stand by us—we are so very lonely here. It might be some—lady. I think we should go—directly—as soon as you are ready, Milly."

"Oh, I am ready," Milly said, starting up. The new idea gave them a little spring and energy. They almost ran to put on their little crape bonnets and their out-door jackets—which had been made for them at the pleasure of the dressmaker, hastily summoned and allowed to work her will—and which were heavy and laden with crape. They were like monuments of woe, from head to foot, in these garments; their two little pale faces, so white and so small, looking out with increased pallor from their heavy black. Milly had a good deal of gold and a good deal of curl in her light brown hair, which shone out with double power, like a protest of nature. Grace's locks were darker and smoother. She was the least pretty of the two, but her eyes were larger and more expressive than those fawn eyes of Milly's, which at present wore but one look, that of startled wistfulness and pleading—an entreaty to all the world to be pitiful. They went off upon their new mission, however, with almost a sense of pleasure in the relief of the novelty, stealing quietly downstairs that nobody might come out upon them to ask questions or offer help.

CHAPTER VI.

It did not occur to the girls in their inexperience to make any attempt to find out who lived at No. 3, Grove Road. They got out of their cab at the door of the house with a flutter of anxious and excited feeling, but still without any thought that the stranger or strangers they were about to see were anonymous, and that their only warrant in thus invading an unknown house was the scrap of paper which they had brought with them as their credentials. The house was a kind of villa, such as abound in the suburbs, with shrubberies around it, and high hedges, and a green door, between two smooth green lines of privet. They stood for a moment and looked round them at the bare tree-tops rising all round against the chilly blue sky; and the unfrequented road all overgrown with grass; and the houses nearly hidden by these jealous hedges. The girls did not understand this jealous privacy of suburban life, and they shivered a little as they looked round, hearing nothing and seeing nothing. In the morning Grove Road was alive with tradesmen's carts, with nursery-maids and children setting out for their walk on the heath, but in the afternoon a dead silence fell upon it. The rooms in which the inmates lived were on the other side, but here nothing was visible over those green lines of hedge, broken only by the still more absolute enclosure of the shut door. They looked at each other, and thought of their father coming out here into the dark, into the rain on that fatal night. They understood now how impossible it would be for him to get either shelter or a carriage to bring him back.

"You would think there was spite in those dreadful doors," said Grace, "wouldn't you, Milly? As if it would give them pleasure to shut themselves tight and refuse all shelter; not a porch that any one could stand under. Oh, when we used to hear of the English liking to be private, we never thought of this!"

Milly looked at them mournfully too, and they both thought of the different scenes they had been used to, with that comparison which it is almost impossible for strangers not to make. Then Grace turned round with a sudden impulse and pulled the bell, which they could hear make a long but subdued tinkle just over the green door. But they had to wait still for some minutes before there was any response. The moment the deed was done, the bell rung and entrance demanded, Milly turned to her sister with her usual "Oh!" of appeal.

"Who will you ask for?" she said.

It was a difficulty that never had occurred to them before; and in their sense of this extraordinary deficiency they had almost fled, shyness taking possession of them, and a sense of being altogether wrong and out of all respectable use and wont. But, on the other hand, it was shabby to run away, a trick not worthy of girls—a schoolboy crime. So they stood trembling, half with cold, half with terror, and by-and-by heard the opening of an inner door and steps approaching. If it had been a solemn butler who had opened to them, even at that moment they would have run away; but it was a pretty, smiling maid, with a white cap and white apron, over whose countenance there passed an indefinable sympathetic change as she saw first the two young faces, and then the deep crape of their dresses. They were cheered and encouraged by this mute sign, the freemasonry of youth and kindness.

"Is —— at home?" said Grace falteringly.

The maid was too intent upon the aspect of the young creatures before her to note that no name was uttered, but only a tremulous counterfeit of sound.

"Missis is not at home, miss," said the girl, with an air of sympathetic regret. Then she added, "But Miss Anna is, and Mr. Geoffrey, if one of them would do."

The girls looked at each other again with a swift mutual consultation. "We should like to see Miss Anna, if you please," said Grace.

And next moment they were within the house. They went along the shadowy green passage into the hall, and through another corridor to the drawing-room at the other side of the house, feeling as if they were in a dream. This, then, was an English home—the first they had ever penetrated into. It was an old house, not fresh and bright like those to which they were accustomed; a house full of old furniture, old hangings, old books. One or two doors were open, and they could not help glancing in as they passed, with a spring of youthful curiosity not yet quenched. When they got to the drawing-room they could scarcely restrain a cry of surprise. It had three long windows opening to a garden at the other side of the house. In front of them lay—all the world, as Grace thought—a great blue distance, in the centre of which rose a smoke, and a vision of distant towers and roofs—great London lying far below; and close at hand a slope of green lawn, with further slopes beyond of heath, and gorse, and dotted trees forming the foreground. This wonderful panorama quite unreasonably lightened their hearts. They had a long time to wait, but it was so full of curiosity and interest that it did not seem long. At length they became aware of the sound of a step coming slowly along the passages, a step accompanied by a little tap as of a stick on the floor. It kept them in tantalising expectation for a minute—then turned aside, and there was again a pause. Finally the little maid came again to the door and led the way into another room.

It was a small room, with the same extended landscape before the window—a room very daintily furnished, lighted up with pretty china, pictures, everything full of delicate colour and glimmers of reflection; little mirrors hidden away in corners, shelves upon the dim walls with dainty vases and cups, everything delicate, everything bright. They took this in with one startled glance before their attention concentrated upon the occupant of the room—a lady who rose slowly, supporting herself with a stick, from a large easy-chair beside the fire. She rose with difficulty, yet there was a sort of slow stately grace in the very stiffness with which she moved. Was this Miss Anna! The hearts of Grace and Milly leaped into their throats, and then seemed to drop back again and stop beating, they thought. They were awed, and dared scarcely draw their breath. Ah, certainly this was England, the old country where queens and princesses were possible. They almost forgot themselves, and their trouble, and their sorrow, and all the strangeness of the circumstances, as they gazed upon this unexpected sight.

Miss Anna was a woman over fifty, with perfectly white hair, and keen, large, dark eyes. She was pale, but with a little evanescent colour, the colour of weakness, as if the slight movement she had made had set the blood in motion, and brought a faint rose tint to her cheeks; otherwise she was like ivory finely cut, her nose a little aquiline, her forehead softly shaded with the white, silvery lines of her hair. She was dressed in soft satin, clinging to her in long folds, which was not the fashion at the time, and, therefore, all the more impressive, and had on her head a sort of lace veil, half shrouding her hair and falling over her shoulders. Her dress had all the air of being studied and thought of, though the faint, yellowish tinge of the lace, and the dark sheen of the satin, wine-colour or plum-colour, were all the elements out of which this effect was

produced. But the simple girls who stood before her had never seen anything like her, and the wonderful apparition took away their breath. She, on her part, looked at them keenly with her penetrating eyes—then she waved her hand towards two chairs set out in front of her throne.

"You asked for me," she said. "Sit down; I fear I have kept you waiting."

Grace and Milly were far too much excited to notice it—but, as a matter of fact, this stately lady was excited too, and the look with which she perused them, their faces, their mourning dresses, their whole appearance, was unquestionably anxious—though this would have seemed to them incredible, impossible. It was only when they sat down that they perceived some one behind in the depths of the room—a man leaning over a writing-table with his head turned away from them. Miss Anna sat full in the light between the window and the fire. She repeated, with a faint tremor of impatience, "You asked for me?"

"Oh, no!" said Grace—she would have liked to say madame, or my lady, or something that would have shown her reverence; but was too shy, with all her self-possession, to venture out of the beaten way. She sat down timidly and folded her hands, and looked at her questioner with that wistful, propitiating look, a faint smile quivering about her lips, her eyes cast upwards with a shy but earnest appeal, which sits so prettily upon extreme youth. "Oh, no," she said, "we did not even know your name. We are very unfortunate girls in great trouble, and we found your address among papa's papers."

"Who is your papa?"

Grace saw nothing but the old lady who gazed at her fixedly and riveted her eyes; but Milly, who had no responsibility of speech, saw more than her sister. She saw the man at the writing-table turn hastily round at the sound of Grace's voice, then rise and approach nearer. When he came into the light she recollected that it was he who had come to them at the hotel the day before.

"Ah," said Grace, her mouth all quivering; "papa is — in heaven. We came over from Canada——" Here, even she, absorbed in her story and the emotion it occasioned, made an involuntary pause, seeing the lady start and look over her head as if at some one behind with a curious look of alarm and trouble. Was it only sympathy? Grace paused while you might count ten, and then went on again—"only a fortnight since; and on Monday he died, and left us all alone, all alone in this strange place. We thought—we thought that he came to see you the first night he was in England."

Here she stopped again; the lady's mouth seemed to quiver too. "Many people come to see me," she said. "What was his name?"

"Robert Yorke. We are his daughters; I am Grace, and this is Milly—the two eldest," said the girl, still with the same pathetic smile about her mouth, while the tears dropped from her eyes.

Miss Anna eyed them all the time with eyes that seemed to run them through and through. "This is a very sad story," she said. There was a quiver in her voice which meant real suffering, not mere pity; but her words were not so tender as this emotion might have indicated; there was no effusiveness of kindness in them. "You are left, then, without friends, without resources? I feel for you very much; but I have a great many applicants——"

Grace started to her feet, pressing her hands together almost with violence. "Oh!" she said, "if you think we are coming to you for charity——"

"Aunt Anna," said the young man, coming forward, "these are the young ladies whom I saw yesterday; if they are so kind, in their own trouble, as to bring us some information, some clue——"

Miss Anna made him an almost imperceptible sign, in which an anxious desire to keep him silent was mingled with the utmost intolerance of impatience. The young man stopped short suddenly; and Milly, who was the spectator of all, taking no other part, saw vaguely this transaction carried on over their heads, and wondered, though she did not know what it could mean.

But Grace perceived nothing at all of this; the tears in her eyes blinded her, made scalding as they were by indignation, and the quick passionate shame with which so young a creature is apt to feel and resent a humiliating judgment. She continued vehemently, "We are not asking anything—we have money enough; we are rich enough—if that is what you mean."

"I did not wish to be unkind," said the stately lady. "Sit down, do not be impatient. Geoffrey, I think we can dispense with your presence. These young ladies will be more at their ease with me alone."

He had pressed forward, in spite of her prohibition. He was a little like her, though not so handsome; but there was no mis-

taking the honest sympathy and feeling in his eyes. Both the girls turned to him with a conviction that here at least was a friend. A sort of faint half-smile of recognition passed between them. "Oh, is it you?" said Grace unawares. They seemed in this enchanted house, in this strange audience-chamber, to have encountered at last some one whom they knew, some one who would stand by them. They looked at him with an anxious, unspoken entreaty not to go away; and he reassured them by the faintest movement of his head.

"I think," he said, "it will be better if I stay."

"I think otherwise," said Miss Anna; but she said no more to him, and made no further objection. "Sit down," she said, touching the chair from which Grace had risen, with her stick. "You must not be offended; I meant no harm. I should not have thought any worse of you had you come to me for help, and I don't think any better of you for being well off. I am sorry for you all the same. But tell me why you came to me. No, wait a little, that can stand. Geoffrey, perhaps you will ring for tea."

He did it without a word, standing before the fire contemplating all the group. The girls did not know what it meant; but gradually it dawned upon them with a strange sensation that they were not the principals here, but that a veiled and hidden conflict was going on between the two strangers, who appeared to share this luxurious home, and who were somehow, they could not tell how, connected with themselves and their concerns. This innocent commonplace request to ring for the tea had, they felt, if they could but understand it, a much more serious meaning than appeared. Geoffrey obeyed, but they felt very grateful to him that he showed no intention of going away.

And then there was a curious pause.

CHAPTER VII.

Of all innocent domestic entertainments there is none more innocent, not to say tame, than the recent institution which is now so universally popular, of afternoon tea. The virtuous dulness, the gentle talk, is seldom enlivened by any dramatic interest going on under the surface. Now and then, indeed, a mild love affair will give a little excitement to the circle round the tea-table, but this is the utmost stretch to which the imagination can reach. And among all the pretty suburban houses, surrounding London with endless circles of comfort and brightness, there could not have been found a more attractive group than that which occupied Miss Anna's pretty sitting-room in Grove Road. But underneath this innocent seeming how many elements of tragedy were working! Miss Anna's motive was known to none of them; but, whatever it was, it was strong enough to make her exert herself in a way which startled her nephew and gave him the watchful, suspicious, gloomy air which was entirely unusual to him. Grace and Milly for their part began to feel the strange fascination exercised over them to be intolerable, yet what with their shyness, and strangeness, and bewilderment, suddenly plunged into a scene so new to them, did not know how to break the spell—though Grace became every moment more sensible of the false position, and even felt it a reproach to her in her sorrow to be turned aside out of her serious course by the light and graceful current of Miss Anna's recollections and anecdotes. Geoffrey, who kept a sort of neutral place between them, was not really aware, save by the instinct which made him divine something wrong underneath the surface, of half the seriousness of the situation. It had not yet occurred to him to identify the dead father of the girls with the visitor who had caused so much commotion in the house some time before. He thought nothing more now than that they had generously come, though in grievous trouble, to convey some information respecting that stranger; and he saw clearly enough that the same motive which had induced his aunt to disown and dismiss the visitor then, was impelling her now to refuse to listen to anything about him.

"I have a great deal of fine Sèvres," Miss Anna said. "Many people tell me I should exhibit it. There are continual exhibitions nowadays to which people send their treasures. There is South Kensington, you know; you have seen that? There is always something of the kind going on there. What! you have not been at South Kensington? Oh, that is very great negligence on the part of your friends. You must really make them take you before you go away. Yes, I was very much urged to send my china there."

It was Milly who murmured the little response which civility demanded; for Grace's impatience was getting the better of her. She felt that she must speak, though the words were taken out of her mouth. But still the old lady went smoothly on.

"Now that I cannot walk I take a great

deal of pleasure in having all my pretty things about me. If you ever should be in such a position—which I trust may never be the case—you will understand what a pleasure it is to have bright surroundings. What, going? It is really quite dark. You must let Geoffrey get a cab for you. Geoffrey, go, dear, and look for a cab."

Grace had got up with an irrestrainable impulse. She came forward a step with her hands tightly clasped. "It is not that we are going," she said. "It is that I must talk to you about the thing that brought us here. I—I—do not know your name—except Miss Anna, as the maid said. Oh, will you please for a moment listen to me? The last night my father was well, before he took his illness, he was, so far as we can tell, here. We found your address among his papers; and he went out and left us for a long time that afternoon saying he was going to see old friends. We cannot think anything else; we feel sure that he must have been here. If you are our dearest father's friend—anything to him—we should like—to know you," said Grace, once more unconsciously clasping her hands. "We do not want anything. We only want to know you, if you were dear papa's friend."

There was another pause, for the fervour of strong emotion with which the girl spoke, her clasped hands and wet eyes, impressed even the vigilant woman who was prepared for everything. It required a moment's resolution even on her part before she crushed the hopes of the young forlorn creature who thus appealed to her. She made a pause, and drew a long breath. Then she said, "Who was your father? You forget that I know nothing about him——"

"Robert Yorke," said Grace. The familiar dear name almost overcame her courage, but she held herself up by main force with her hands clasped. "There is nobody better known where we come from—Robert Yorke, of Quebec——"

"My dear young lady," said Miss Anna—and she sank back in her chair with a certain relief—a relaxation of the strain with which she had kept herself up to be ready for any emergency, which was not lost upon her nephew at least—"you have made some mistake. I never heard the name in my life. I never knew any one, or, to my knowledge, saw any one of that name."

"A fortnight ago, on Tuesday; and it rained very much in the evening," Grace said eagerly. "He told us he could not get a carriage, it was so far out of town; and he got very wet."

"He caught cold—and it was that—it was that——" Milly added her contribution to what her sister said, but her voice broke, and she could not conclude her sentence.

Miss Anna sat and looked on politely attentive, but at the same time ostentatiously indifferent. "It is very sad," she said. "It is impossible to tell you how sorry I am; but I never heard of Mr. Yorke in my life. Geoffrey, that is true, it is very difficult to get a cab; go and look for one. I cannot permit these young ladies to wander away alone in a strange place. Go, Geoff, go!"

She was very anxious to be rid of him; her voice took the imperious tone, which he had obeyed so often, but he did not seem disposed to obey now.

"A fortnight ago," he said, "on a dark afternoon, turning to rain?"

"Yes, yes; you remember—oh, do you remember?—and afterwards we saw you at the hotel." The two girls spoke both together, one saying the former part, the other the latter of the sentence, both turning upon him with the most anxious eyes, gazing, trying to penetrate into his inmost soul.

"Geoff, why do you stand there?" cried Miss Anna. She, too, got energetic, and more and more imperious. "Go, I tell you, and get a cab for them. Two strangers, and far from where they are living. You know what your mother will think of such visitors. Go, directly, as I tell you." She stamped as she spoke, first her stick and then her foot, impatiently on the floor.

"This cannot be settled so summarily," said Geoffrey; "there is more in it. It is not necessary that we should stay in your room, Aunt Anna, if you dislike it; but I wish these ladies to remain till my mother is here——"

"Your mother, who always believes everything that is said to her! Let there be an end to this folly at once, Geoff; go and get a cab."

"Aunt Anna, there had better be no struggle between us—yet. What I ask is very simple—that they should see my mother."

"Do you want to see his mother?" she said, suddenly turning upon the astonished girls. "You have made acquaintance with him, I can see; but mothers have sharp eyes, and his mother thinks every girl she sees is in love with her fascinating son. Can't he see you at some other place? I warn you my sister will give you no pleasant reception if she finds you here."

"Grace, Grace, let us go away," cried Milly, rising to her feet, scarlet with shame;

but Grace had other things to think of, and paid no attention to this assault.

"I don't want to be harsh," continued Miss Anna; "but if you are good girls it will be much better for you to go away at once. I don't say you are not good girls, far from it. I don't pretend to judge; but girls of your age should not be going about to strange houses without invitation, especially where there is a young man. It has a strange look—your people would not like it. I advise you as your friend to go away."

Here Milly clasped Grace by the arm, and drew her back a little; perhaps some passing communication from Geoffrey's eyes had made the younger sister more keen-sighted for once. Grace turned round a little, and there was the usual consultation by looks between them; the result of which was that Grace's pale countenance became also suffused with colour; but she held her ground, though her sister drew her back.

"I do not think, if you were kind," she said, "that you would speak so to two girls like us. You would protect us rather from every evil thought. We came here because we have no friends, thinking that they must have been friends to whom papa came that last day; thinking, perhaps, you were relations—somebody who would take a little interest in us. If it is not so, there can be no reason why we should stay."

Geoffrey put out his hand with an eager gesture. "Till my mother comes," he said.

"Young ladies," cried Miss Anna, "I will tell you what that boy means; he wants to make you out to be the children of a sort of madman who was here some time ago—an impostor: a fellow who gave himself out as—who represented himself to be—a man who has been dead for years. Would you like to have a slur put upon your father, who appears to have been a respectable person?" she added more calmly. She had yielded to an impulse of anger, and had flushed passionately. But at the last words she calmed down, and spoke with distinct and slow utterance, with a slight curl of contempt about her mouth.

"Grace, Grace," cried Milly, "let us go away!"

Grace's face varied every moment as one emotion after another swept over it. "I don't know what to do," she said piteously, "Milly." Then added, "I think there is something to find out—I think there is something more!"

"If you wish to have your father's character taken away, and the cheat he attempted found out——" cried Miss Anna, with sudden fury. Then she stopped, seeing the mistake she had made. "I beg your pardon, I am sure," she went on, with fictitious amiability. "You are making me identify this respectable person from Canada, poor man, for whom I am very sorry—with a wretched impostor, a fellow that never came back, or made the slightest effort to support his ridiculous claim." Here again she saw she was committing herself, and stopped short. "Of course, if you like to stay till my sister comes back," she added, "I can have no objection. She is a silly, credulous woman; she will believe any story you like to tell her, so you may give the rein to your invention. But one caution I will give you: say nothing about her son. Make believe, at all events, that you know nothing about her son."

"Oh, Grace, why should we be insulted? What can it matter to us? Let us go away," Milly cried.

But if there was one thing better known among the young Yorkes than another, it was that Grace was obstinate. Nothing, the boys said, would make her give in, even when she was beaten. She turned round to Geoffrey, even while her sister was speaking.

"Sir," she said, "we don't know you, not even your name; but if you think your mother will understand better—if you think she will know anything, we will wait for her. We do not want money, or help, if that is what Miss Anna supposes; we want nothing except to know——"

"Then why in heaven's name do you insist on staying? against my will, who am the mistress of the house? I say I will not have you here. I will have no adventurers here. I do not believe there is a word of truth in your story. That man is not dead. Impostors never die. It is all a got-up affair from beginning to end. Look here!" cried Miss Anna, striking her stick on the floor, "as I don't want to have the whole story raked up in a court of justice, where you would not have a chance, not a leg to stand upon, you or your precious father—I'd rather come to terms with you, and let it go no farther. How much will you take to give up your claims altogether? They are false, utterly false; but I don't want to be made a talk of. I would rather settle it and be done with it, if you will say how much you will take, and start by the next steamboat. There is a steamboat every week, every day perhaps, for anything I know."

The girls stood close together listening aghast, Milly thinking nothing less than that

Miss Anna must be a mad woman, and that now her insanity was becoming visible. But to Grace's more active mind, this strange proposal conveyed an impression quite different. She looked at Geoffrey, whose turn it now seemed to be to blush. He had made an effort to interfere, and stop Miss Anna, but, failing in that, had drawn a step back, and stood with a painful flush on his face listening to her. As she ended, he stepped forward again.

"With this proposal," he said, "please to remark, neither I nor my mother have anything to do."

"There is something, then, upon which we have a claim," Grace cried; "and we are not mistaken after all!"

"Oh, Grace," cried Milly, "come away—come away! What does it matter to us? We don't understand this country, or its ways. Oh, how we used to think of England, how delightful it was to be! but now it is dreadful. If you went to the poorest house in Canada," cried the girl, "and said, We are in trouble, we are all alone, our father is dead, they would take you in, they would be kind to you; but here they say we are impostors, and offer us money. Oh, Grace, Grace, come away!"

With her eyes sparkling through her tears, her soft cheeks flushed with resentment and shame, her hands clasping her sister's arm, whom she endeavoured to draw away, Milly turned towards the door. It was not often she took the initiative, or even gave utterance to so many words; but Milly was not quick enough to divine any secret meaning, or to see anything but offence and insult in what had been said. Her only thought was to escape—all the more as she had felt a secret confidence that they had fallen among friends on seeing Geoffrey; and the disappointment made her revulsion of feeling more complete.

The door opened behind as she spoke, and another lady came in. The newcomer had her bonnet on, and brought with her a waft of fresh air from out of doors. She was not beautiful, like Miss Anna, but she had the same white hair and dark eyes—eyes not so penetrating, but kinder. She came in with an untroubled air, as a woman comes into her own house, expecting nothing but the ordinary domestic calm. She stopped short, however, when she saw the visitors, and uttered a little exclamation, "Oh!" somewhat tremulous, like Milly's own. She was a shy woman for one thing, and for another, having been so lately excited by an unusual visitor, she felt slightly nervous of every new figure. "I did not know you had visitors, Anna," she said.

"These are not my visitors," said Miss Anna; "if they are anybody's visitors, they are your son's."

Then the friendly face before them clouded over. She cast one reproachful look at Geoffrey, and turned her back upon the two dark figures in their depth of crape. This was her weakness, but it was a weakness which was full of compunctions. Her son was all she had in the world; and though she would say now and then that to see him married was the height of her ambition, yet this good mother feared and almost hated every feminine creature under thirty, and turned her back upon the whole race lest Geoffrey's future wife might be found among them. When she had done this, however, her heart always melted, as now. She was, in reality, one of the most womanly of women, and liked nothing so well as feminine companions when she could put confidence in them that they would not take her son from her. The two faces, however, upon which she cast a remorseful glance now, after she had turned her back upon them, were of the most dangerous type. They were the faces of two predatory creatures against whom she felt there was no defence. Either of them was capable under her very eyes of sweeping Geoff away from her for ever and ever. Never did hen look upon fox with more dismay; but Mrs. Underwood was not a consistent or firm woman. She looked and trembled; but then looked again, and was touched in spite of herself. They were very young; they were in deep mourning; and *they were not paying the slightest attention to Geoffrey*. Perhaps that last was the most moving circumstance of all.

"Visitors of my son's? That means, I suppose," said Mrs. Underwood, with a little gasp, yet a heroic effort, "visitors to me?"

"I am glad you think so, Mary. It is no concern of mine," said Miss Anna turning significantly away.

And then politeness compelled Mrs. Underwood to offer civilities she had very little mind to. "Won't you sit down?" she said. "Geoff, you will perhaps introduce me to your friends."

She sighed; there was something half-ludicrous in the pathos of her tone.

"I hope we may be friends hereafter," said Geoffrey; "but at present there is something to be settled which is more than friendship. Mother, you remember your

cousin, Leonard Crosthwaite, and his sudden visit here a fortnight ago?"

"Leonard Crosthwaite;" she said the name trembling, and turned involuntarily with a frightened look to where her sister sat.

"He means," said Miss Anna, without turning her head, "the impostor, or madman, who assumed the name of—our relation who died twenty years ago."

"Mother, listen," said Geoffrey. "It is a terrible story so far as I can make it out. He went from you, to die; and these are his daughters."

Mrs. Underwood turned from one to another as her son spoke, now reading his face, now Miss Anna's, now throwing an anxious glance at the sisters who stood together in the centre of the room, not knowing what new turn their affairs might be about to take.

At this an exclamation burst from all three at once. The girls said, "No, no!" while Mrs. Underwood cried out, "Leonard's daughters!" "No, no, no, no!" the others said.

"So far as I can see," repeated the young man, "he is dead, and cannot tell us how it stands. These are the young ladies whom I found at the hotel to which I went in search of him—his hotel, the address he gave you. And their father came out on a wintry afternoon a fortnight ago, a Tuesday, to visit friends—old friends of whom he told them nothing. He went home drenched — you remember how it rained, mother?—and took to his bed. Now that he is dead, they found our address among his papers. This is the story, and what can you want more? It seems to me that it is clear enough!"

"But," said Grace, "there is one great mistake you make. Our name, it is not Crosthwaite—oh, nothing like it; we never heard that name before. Papa was not a man to go by a false name. Oh, no, no; he was true in everything. There must still be some mistake."

Miss Anna, who had turned her chair away, turned round again at this. "I told you," she said; "this young fellow wants to prove you to be the daughters of an impostor or a madman. Of course, he was not a man to go by a false name. Nobody would do that who was, as you say, a respectable person, a man thought well of in his own place. You know better than to think so. Of course: that is exactly what I said."

But this support sent Grace instantly into opposition. She paused to consider, when she found herself suddenly embarrassed by this unexpected backing up. Miss Anna's eyes fixed upon her seemed to have a baneful influence, and oppressed her soul.

"Does it make any difference to you," she said, with the trenchant simplicity of ignorance, "what was my father's name?"

The question was so entirely unexpected that each of the three showed its effect in a different, yet characteristic way. Miss Anna, listening with the complacency and satisfaction with which Grace's denial of the name had filled her, received this stray shot full in her breast, and without any preparation. She wavered, drew back, contracted her features involuntarily in the effort to preserve her perfect calm. Mrs. Underwood gasped as if some one had seized her by the throat. As for Geoffrey, he was the only one who replied.

"If," he said, "you are Leonard Crosthwaite's daughters, as I believe, it will make a great deal of difference to us all."

"The question was addressed to me," said Miss Anna, with a slight trembling that ran over all her person; "and it is for me to answer it. Young lady, whoever you are, if you are Leonard Crosthwaite's daughter, which I don't believe for a moment—I have no doubt your father was a much more respectable man—but if you are, and can prove it, you will be able to give rise to a great lawsuit, which will be fought out on both sides for years; which will cost you every penny you have if you have anything, and ruin everybody belonging to you; besides bringing out a great many things about the family you claim to belong to, which we would all much rather keep to ourselves; and in all likelihood it would be a failure at the end. That is the true state of the case, whatever that boy may tell you—or any one else," she added after a moment, with a glance at her sister, "or any one else. This world is full of fools."

"Oh, Grace, come—come away!" cried Milly in her sister's ear.

What was the girl to do? She was bewildered, and confused, and alarmed. It seemed to her that the rights of her family were in her hand, and her mind leaped to great things—far greater than this simple house and its riches. Perhaps Lenny—yes, certainly, she remembered now, though it had not occurred to her before, her boy-brother's name was Leonard — might be the heir of some great property, and only she to defend his rights. Grace stood and looked at them all with a swelling of her breast, yet a dazzled dimness of her eyes, as if she were about to faint. She never had

done such a thing in her life; but then she never had been in such an extraordinary strait, and with nobody to advise her. No wonder the light which she wanted so much within to clear up the way before her, should seem to fail without.

"I can't see my way," she said faintly. "I cannot tell what to do. Yes, Milly, we will go away; but for all that, it is not finished," she said, turning to Miss Anna with a gleam of dim defiance in her eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE girls were now as eager to go away as they had been to come; they would scarcely wait for the cab which was sent for, and they paid very little attention to the anxious civilities of Mrs. Underwood and Geoffrey, who conducted them to the door and put them into the carriage, making every kind of wistful endeavour to obliterate the impressions made upon their minds by the other member of the family. Grace and Milly were in too great haste to consult each other, to compare notes, and to realise this strange new complication in their lives, to have their ears open to Mrs. Underwood's apologies.

"You must not mind Anna," she said in an undertone, as she led them into the hall, with its dark oaken furniture and scanty light, out of the warm and softened brightness of Miss Anna's room. "She has always been used to have her own way; she cannot bear to be contradicted. When she takes anything into her head it is so difficult to convince her; oh, she is a great deal cleverer than I am, that is true; but she will not be convinced when she has taken a thing into her head."

This little explanatory stream of talk seemed to flow round them as they went to the door, but they paid very little attention to it. They scarcely heard Mrs. Underwood's promise to go and see them at their hotel next day; and they submitted with a little surprise rather than accepted with any pleasure her offer of kindness, when she took each in succession by the hand and kissed her, with a mixture of nervous timidity and affection. "If it is so, we are relations," she said almost under her breath; "and if it is not so, my poor dears, my poor children, my heart bleeds for you all the same." The water trembling in her eyes and the quaver of her voice showed the good woman's sincerity; but the girls were scarcely moved by it, so full were their minds of this discovery, which they did not understand. As for Geoffrey, he said nothing at all; he shut the door of the cab and lingered for a moment looking at them wistfully, but that was all. There was in his face a pained consciousness of the difference between his own position and theirs. He, with his home behind him, and all the long-established household gods which had protected him all his life; while the other two, so much younger, feebler, and less able to shift for themselves, had nothing but the cold foreign shelter of a hotel to go back upon. He stood bareheaded in the rain, which, to complete the resemblance with their father's visit to this place, began to drizzle down continuously out of the dim persistent skies; and his face was the last thing they saw, gazing compassionately after them as they disappeared into the darkness. They were too much preoccupied even to notice this—at least Grace was too much preoccupied. Milly for her part saw him very well, but said nothing. Her mind too was full of other thoughts—yet not so full but that she could remark this quietly to herself.

But though they left Grove Road in great excitement they were not disappointed. If they had found themselves simply mistaken, and that nothing was known there of their father or his visit, they would have felt themselves to have fallen from some eminence of hope, which in present circumstances they had by no means lost. Had they been received with kind indulgence as strangers, rousing no hostile or any other kind of feeling, but simply a little surprise, they would have been cruelly disappointed; but the excitement of seeing themselves regarded with alarm as dangerous intruders, so important as to be perilous to family peace, flattered them in the most subtle way. As they went slowly down the hill, jolting over the stones, their hearts were fluttered by a sense of dignity which they had never felt before. They laid their girlish heads together as they had been longing to do since ever they set foot in that strange enchanted place. What could it be? what solemn inheritance, what great fortune, to justify the panic which they had seen by movements beneath all the glitter and bravado of Miss Anna's words? Between that exciting and wonderful idea and the associations with their father of which the darkling road seemed full, their minds were transported altogether out of their own trouble and raised into an atmosphere of high interest and responsibility. It would depend, they thought, upon how they now behaved whether their whole

position might be changed. They were well ofi enough; there was no want in their house, nor had they any reason to suppose that their father's death would leave them destitute. But there was a great difference between that state of ordinary and commonplace comfort, and this dazzling probability. It might have been a vacant principality, almost a throne, from the way in which Grace and Milly contemplated it. They felt as if their former life had been arrested, and that something new, altogether unrealised and unrealisable, awaited them in the future. "If we only knew what to do; if we could only decide on what is best," Grace said. This was the difficulty now. This morning there had seemed nothing before them but a patient, melancholy waiting for their mother's sad letter, and the news of her arrangements for their return to her; now they thought no longer of the voyage home or of anything connected with it, but of what to do and say as representatives of their father, and heads, so to speak, of the family, working on their behalf. "It will change everything," Grace said again thoughtfully. "Instead of all of us being alike, Lenny—Lenny will be the heir. That is one thing that gives a likelihood to it," she added, sinking her voice as if the cab-driver might perhaps hear and report the matter. "His name, Milly! I never thought of it till a few minutes ago. Lenny; of course he is Leonard; and when you think of it, why was he called Leonard? None of our relations are called by that name."

"I thought of it directly," said Milly, with a little satisfaction.

Grace, in her excitement, threw her arms round her sister. "It is you who ought to be the first of us two," said Grace admiringly. "It is true that I am the eldest—but so many things occur to you that never come into my head."

"It is because I have the time to think while you are talking," Milly said with modesty; but she was not displeased with this testimony to her superior insight. She added, with a little awe: "Gracie, I wonder if *that*—is our real name?"

This was a question that took away the breath of both. They looked at each other almost with an inclination to laugh, then stopped short and mutually contemplated the impulse with horror. "It is dreadful," said Milly, "isn't it, to have a false name?"

"I don't know," said Grace, who had been so indignant an hour ago at the suggestion; "it cannot be so very dreadful if papa did it. There are reasons that account for everything." Her momentary humility had disappeared by this time, and she felt equal to explaining all mysteries to her sister in her usual way. "He must have been wronged somehow when he left home. I suspect that Miss Anna, Milly; I am sure she is at the bottom of everything. She must have told lies of him, or invented stories; and then perhaps he was disinherited, and the money given to her. It would not be money; it would be lands or an estate—perhaps a fine old house." Then they paused and looked at each other for a moment. "If that was how it was, and we got it back, mamma would certainly have to come *then*."

"But it would not be for all of us; it would only be for Lenny," said Milly doubtfully.

"Lenny is only fifteen; he would not be of age for ever so long. And then it is always stipulated," said Grace, "that when people have estates, what is called a great stake in the country, they should be educated in the country and made to understand it." Insensibly she drew herself up, holding her head higher at the thought—"Mamma would not like it; but she would do what was best for Lenny——"

"Then I suppose," Milly said, and now in spite of herself the smallest little laugh, instantly repented of, burst from her. She looked at her sister in great alarm, with a portentously serious countenance. "I suppose," she repeated, as if, instead of something ridiculous, this had been the most solemn suggestion in the world, "that Lenny—will be the one of us that will be important now."

So full was Grace of the seriousness of this thought, that she replied, without taking any notice of that guilty laugh, only by an inclination of her head: "We will have to learn all about the laws, and how things are managed, for Lenny's sake," she said seriously. "He will be a magistrate, you know, and most likely in Parliament; and he will be rather behind by losing so much time in Canada. We will have to coach him up."

"Oh but, Gracie, I don't know things myself; I never was able to do that."

"I must begin directly," said Grace with a little sigh—the sigh of the self-devoted. "It was such a business—don't you remember, Milly?—to coach him for school; and England—England is a great deal more difficult. I think I must begin Greek directly, and law—or he will never know his lessons. I hope mamma will see that it is her duty, Milly," she added still more seriously. Milly for

one second was inclined to laugh again at this portentous and preposterous importance of her young brother, but then she recollected herself, and the tears filled her eyes.

"Oh, poor mamma!" she cried, "poor mamma! to come now!"

This turned once more the current of their thoughts. But when they got back to their hotel the argument was resumed, for it soon became an argument maintained with great heat on one side, with an unimaginable gentle obstinacy on the other. Milly, who never went against her sister's will, was for once in opposition, and though she was not strong enough to subdue Grace, she did not yield to her.

They had begun languidly and mournfully to arrange their father's papers in the morning. Now Grace betook herself to this pursuit with passion. She found nothing; some fragments of torn letters, torn up into very small pieces, on one of which the name of "Anna" occurred, lay in the bottom of his dressing bag; but Grace was not sufficiently skilled in the art of detection to join them together as a more experienced investigator might have done. It revolted her too to pry into what the dead man had thus wished to conceal. And in all his other stores there was not a word which even suggested any information. He had scrawled, "3, Grove Road," on a page of his blotting-paper, and twice over in other places, as if afraid of forgetting it. When she came to a little diary he had kept she paused with a sensation of awe. She had seen it a hundred times—had seen it lying open, and knew that no special sanctity was attributed to it. It was nothing but a little record of events and engagements; but when the hand is still that has scribbled these careless memoranda, how strangely their character changes! She took it to where Milly sat, and placed herself on the sofa beside her. "I cannot read this by myself," she said.

"Oh, why should we read it at all, Grace? If papa had wanted us to know he would have told us."

"Hush! even papa shall not make me suffer injustice," cried the excited girl. But when the little book was opened it gave but the scantiest information. There was one entry since the landing in England, and no more; and this was all it contained:—

"Same name in directory, at old address; to go first thing and inquire."

Grace gave a little cry when she read this; it seemed to her to tell all she wanted—and yet it told nothing. "It is quite clear," she cried in her mistaken little triumph. Milly looked at it too with all the feeling that it was an important revelation. Then they cried a little over the foolish little events of the voyage, all set down there, with that strange unconsciousness of what was coming, which makes death so doubly terrible to the survivors. If he had but known, surely he would have put something in that little record to console, to elevate, to calm the survivors, to whom his every word was so soon to be sacred! But he did not know, and put down nothing but "Wind so-and-so; a little fog in the morning. Captain's birthday; champagne at dinner," and such other nothings. They folded it carefully away in paper and sealed it, with an ache at their hearts. Oh, if he had but known! and so told them something, left them some inheritance, if it had only been a task to do! "But there is something to do!" Grace cried; "this that he began; and I will never never give it up till Lenny has his rights! He is papa's heir."

CHAPTER IX.

THESE vague gropings after an unknown fact were very different from the discussions which took place in Grove Road when the girls were gone. Mrs. Underwood and her son lingered together for a moment in the hall. She took hold of Geoffrey's arm with both her hands, and leaned for a moment upon his shoulder and shed a few tears of agitation and distress.

"You must not be frightened, mother. We can get on together, whatever happens," he said in her ear.

"Oh, Geoff, how can I help being frightened? I would not wrong anybody—not by the value of a straw."

"I am sure you would not, mother. I know you would not."

"But what a difference it will make—oh, what a difference!" cried poor Mrs. Underwood.

She cried for a moment on her son's shoulder. Was it to be expected that she could give up the greater part of her living without a sigh?

"And then Anna," she said, "Anna!" with a tone of mingled fright and pain.

It would seem almost as if her sister had divined, for she could not hear, this reference to herself; for she called sharply in a keen voice which penetrated through the closed door. Mrs. Underwood started immediately, dropping her son's arm.

"Must you always fly the moment she

calls, as if you were her maid?" said Geoff indignantly.

His mother put up her hand to his mouth.

"I have always done it and could I stop it now when perhaps she is going to lose everything? Oh, hush! hush! I am coming, I am coming, Anna," she cried.

"She will never lose you, mother," he said, detaining her. "I can see already what will happen. You will make yourself her slave, and give up every comfort in your life."

"What can I do? What can I do? I have you, but she has nobody. I am coming, Anna, I am coming," she said.

Miss Anna still sat in her easy-chair, with the tea-table by her. Her forehead was slightly contracted, her lips parted with a quickened breath; but these faint indications were all that showed any agitation in her. She addressed her sister when she appeared in a sharper tone than usual. "You two have been having a little consultation," she said. "Oh, quite right; quite right. Two heads are better than one. It might be considered a little ungenerous, perhaps, to the other who has no one to consult with—but I am used to it. I know what a single woman has to expect in life."

"Oh, Anna!" her sister said, with a faint remonstrance, "when you know that you are always our first thought."

"Your first thought! I did not know I was of so much importance," said Miss Anna with a laugh. "One would scarcely think it to see how little attention you pay to me—either you or Geoff. But I must not complain, for it is your money as well as mine that he is so anxious to make a present of to the new claimants. And I can see very well what his motive is—very well. Oh, I know men and their motives, though I have never married. I can see through them well enough."

"My motive! what motive can I have but justice?" the young man said.

"Oh, Geoffrey! hush, my dear. When you know it is your aunt's way. Why should there be any quarrelling, to make everything worse?"

"Yes, it is his aunt's way. I am not the sort of fool that accepts everything," said Miss Anna. "I can read him like a book. He has had to have his living doled out to him through you and me, and now he sees a way of getting the better of us—of turning the tables upon us. Oh, it is clear enough. Two girls—two silly creatures that will believe every word he says; but take my advice, Geoffrey, and choose the little one. She is the one that you can turn round your little finger; the other has a will of her own. Though it is against myself, you see, I can still give you good advice."

Geoffrey made no reply to this speech. His mother fluttered between him and Miss Anna with her hands spread out like the wings of a protecting bird, ready to burst in and forestall him had he attempted to do so; but he did not speak for some minutes. Then he said coldly, "We must not quarrel, as my mother says. We are all threatened with a great danger. For anything we can tell, the girls you are talking of so lightly can take the greater part of our living from us. The question not only is, have they a real claim? but can they establish it? and how far are we ready to go in the way of resistance? Rather, how far are *you* ready to go? Will moral certainty be enough for you, or do you demand legal proof?"

"Moral fiddlestick!" said Miss Anna. "Morals have nothing to do with it. We were always as near in blood as Leonard was; we had as good a right as he had; indeed, we had a better right, being girls, to be provided for. Uncle Abraham thought of the name when he chose his nephew instead of his nieces. And that showed his wisdom—for the nephew seems to have thrown off the name the moment he left the country; and of all the claimants there is only one Crosthwaite, and that is me. I do not care a brass farthing for your moral certainty. All it means is, that you have made up your mind to stand by your opinion through thick and thin. It is your opinion that the man who came here the other night was Leonard. Well! you think so, and he said so—but that is no proof."

"Oh, Anna!" cried her sister, "speak of him kindly. Poor Leonard! when you have just heard that he is dead——"

"What is his dying to me?" she cried, with a glance of fury. "That's the man that was held up to us all as the image of faithfulness. Not one of you but has told me if I had not treated him so badly, this and that would not have happened; and the hound has changed his name, and married, and been happy all the time!" Then she stopped and looked at Geoffrey with a contemptuous laugh. "Mind you, I don't acknowledge that was Leonard Crosthwaite. It suits my purpose a great deal better to believe that he was the pink of fidelity, and died of a broken heart."

"Very few people, they say," said Mrs.

Underwood, in a reluctant voice, "die of broken hearts."

Miss Anna's bright eyes seemed to give out gleams of malice and scorn and indignant ridicule. "But I believe in them," she said. "I am romantic, not prosaic like you. When you know it's for your sake, then, naturally, you believe in it." She stopped to laugh, her bosom panting with a mixture of contempt and fury. "If Leonard did not die for me as he promised he would, he was a poor creature. Heirs! what had he to do with heirs? If he did not die he was a traitor and a liar. Geoff, there is no poetry in you; you are a commonplace being; that is why you are capable of believing that Leonard Crosthwaite lived, and throve, and married, and had heirs. I do not believe a word of it," she said. And again she laughed. After all, there was something behind the self-interest that determined her resistance—something which the more honourable people who gazed at her with so much wonder and alarm did not perceive. Her laugh was not of merriment but of that last scorn of humanity which is despair. It made her furious, it transported her beyond all limits of nature. She had believed in this one man as true and faithful beyond all question; and he had been the greatest deceiver of all. This put such fierce scorn into her breast that she could not contain herself. The more selfish a nature is the more is it lacerated by desertion. This was a woman who had put herself above others all her life, and had been punished by the gradual failure of all whose worship she had once believed in. This was the final blow to her self-esteem, and she resented it with wild wrath and frantic ridicule of the traitor. But who was to tell that her last realisation of the possibility of honour and truth went with this discovery? She appeared to the others like an unscrupulous woman, firmly determined to hold by her inheritance against all claimants—which she was: but also something more.

"All that is beyond the question," said Geoffrey; "it is very possible that legal proof may be hard to get. We might fight it out at law for years; we might ruin them and ourselves too in the effort to make it quite clear. The question is for you, mother, as well as Aunt Anna. If you are sure these are the heirs, though they cannot prove it in law, what will you do?"

Poor Mrs. Underwood was taken entirely without preparation. She turned to her son with a gasp, clasping her hands together in dismay. She was a woman who had always been told what to do by somebody—her husband, her sister, her son, had managed her mind for her. When she knew what was expected of her she did it faithfully, holding by her *consigne* whatever happened. She had kept by her orders under the most trying circumstances indeed: struggling against the glimmerings of right judgment in her own breast, even while silenced by Anna's casuistry. Since Geoffrey grew up her course had been easier, though even with his support her sister's older influence was sometimes too much for her. But now to be asked instead of told—to have a decision demanded from her instead of made for her, took away her breath.

"Oh, Geoff," she said, "my dear! how can you expect me to understand anything about the law? I should like to be kind to the girls, poor things. Of course I should like to be kind to them. I would not ruin them, poor fatherless children, for all the world. How could you think such a thing of me?"

"That is not what I am asking you, mother. If you are sure they ought to have the money, though they cannot prove it legally, what will you do?"

Mrs. Underwood turned a frightened look towards her sister, who laughed; then her eyes returned to the face of her son, which was very serious, and gave her no guidance. "Do?" she murmured faintly, "I will do—whatever is thought right, Geoff."

"But what do *you* think right, mother?"

Geoffrey felt that if he had not put a powerful control upon himself, he might have turned round upon the laughing spectator behind him and taken her by the throat.

"Poor Geoff!" said Miss Anna; "between his mother, who cannot understand, and I who understand better than a woman ought, he is in a hard case. You had better have it out with me. What shall we do in case there is no legal proof? You know very well there is but one thing to do. Keep ourselves on our guard and refuse any concession. What else? Fancy is one thing, but property is another. You can't go chucking that about like a ball. It must stay in the hands it is in, until others have proved a right to it. You who were brought up for the bar, and you need me to tell you that?"

"This is how the case stands, mother," said Geoffrey. "The money which is the greater part of our living was left to your cousin, Leonard Crosthwaite, and only to you failing him and his heirs. You thought he was

dead, without heirs, and you have enjoyed it all this time with an easy mind. But a fortnight ago Leonard Crosthwaite appeared. You did not know him at first, but before he went away you were convinced it was he. Is not this all true?"

"She fancied it was he, being a silly woman who believes everybody's story, and never knew a lie from the truth all her days."

"And you, Aunt Anna," said Geoffrey, turning upon her with quick impatience, "did you ever know truth from a lie?"

"I have had no practice to speak of," she answered; "lies have been told me ever since I can remember. The other is a great deal more uncommon. Don't puzzle your mother with sophistries. Tell her what you want, that is the shortest way."

"Indeed, dear," said Mrs. Underwood, with deprecating looks, "your Aunt Anna is right; it would be better just to tell me what I am to do. I would have done anything for poor Leonard. Poor fellow! to die among strangers, far from his poor wife and everybody that knew him! My heart bleeds for *her*, Geoff. If they had sent for me I would have gone in a moment to nurse him and take care of him. You don't suppose I would have been so cruel as to let him die by himself if I had known? And now these poor girls. Oh, what a change for them! to come here for pleasure, and to have all their amusement, poor things, turned into misery and sorrow!" Here the kind woman's voice was choked with tears.

"Mother! mother!" said Geoffrey, "you are the best woman in the world: but I think you will drive me out of my senses all the same."

Mrs. Underwood dried her eyes after a moment and looked up in his face with a tremulous little smile. "That is what your poor father used to say," she replied with great simplicity. "I am not one to see the rights of anything at a glance like Anna; but if you will explain to me what it is best to do, you will see I will always do it, Geoff. You may trust me for that."

What was Geoffrey to do? He did his best to shut his ears to Miss Anna's laugh and her remark, "You perceive it is always a great deal better to talk things over with me." It was quite true, but he would not pay any attention to it. To discuss this matter with her was impossible to him. He stood for a little while by the fire, staring into the mirror, where his own troubled countenance appeared in the centre of all the little carved shelves covered with china, which were reflected on every side. He felt himself, as he had done so many times before, altogether out of place in the house, where he was sometimes the master and sometimes of less account than the dog. So far Geoffrey was always the master. His tastes, his comforts, and even his convenience were the subjects of endless study. But between his mother's incapacity for any mental exertion, and his aunt's too keen and casuistical intelligence, it often happened that Geoffrey was driven to the end of his patience, and felt himself no better than a puppet between them, vainly struggling against Miss Anna's false logic and his mother's shifty feebleness. At these moments a sort of sickness of despair came over the young man. He thought with longing of any wild scene of emigrant life, any diggings, or sheep-walks, into which he could escape, to encounter the grosser elements of life, and be free of this feminine atmosphere. To plant him here between these two ladies seemed a freak of fate which was unaccountable. Their motives, their ideas, were all different from his. Geoffrey stood for a few minutes staring at himself, thinking what a gloomy ruffian he looked, and how much out of keeping with all these dainty surroundings; then he went hastily out, notwithstanding the appeal of both ladies to him. "You are not going out in the rain, Geoff?" cried his mother; while Miss Anna bade him recollect that it was past six o'clock. Geoffrey paid no attention to either. It would be almost a satisfaction, he felt, to make her wait for her dinner. Not his mother, who cared as little for her dinner as any woman could do, but Miss Anna, who was *gourmande*, and could not bear to wait. He was glad, too, of the sting of the rain, blown in his face as he stepped out from all the comfort and warmth of the too warm, luxurious house. The chill air and the darkness were such a contradiction to all the conditions of life there that they refreshed him. He went out upon the borders of the heath, and looked down through the rain upon the distant lights, the smoke of great London lying spread out before him. Though he had been bred among women, and luxuriously cared for all his life, he was not without some knowledge of what existence was outside. And now, when he set himself to think of it, the prospect gave him a shiver. It was almost as discouraging, as dismal as the wet world upon which he looked. He had been called to the bar a

few years before, and he had got one or two briefs, which had been a matter of much pride and amusement to the household. But this was a very different thing from living by his work. He tried to realise what the consequences would be of giving up the fortune of which he was aware he had talked lightly enough. If it was all he could do to put up with that feminine atmosphere now, in the midst of abundant space and the many pleasant engagements which relieved him from its monotony, what would it be when he was shut up with it in a few small rooms, where his only relaxation would be home, and his home still, in its scantiness and impoverishment, the domain of Aunt Anna? There flashed before him a vision of one small sitting-room, with her chair in the chief place, her work occupying the table, her nerves affected by every sound, her quick ears catching every word that was said. Geoffrey felt himself able for other kinds of privation, for hard work if need was, for the resignation of most things that were pleasant in life—but when he thought of this his heart failed him. And there was no help for it. Anna had been the tyrant of her sister's life as long as she remembered, and to withdraw from her now when she was poor would be impossible. To suffer is always possible; there is nothing in life so likely, so universally put up with—but to abandon those who have shared our lives is not a thing that can be done. It is a bond which the worst recognise, which it does not even require heroic virtue to be faithful to. To do it may be heroic, but not to do it is miserable. In prosperity Aunt Anna might by possibility—though by so distant a possibility that Geoffrey hitherto had always felt it hopeless—have been shaken off; but in trouble or poverty she would be the absolute sovereign of his life, and his mother would be her slave. As the young man stood with the rain beating in his face, seeing by times, as the blast permitted, the glimmer of the distant lights through the wet mist, he perceived and consented to this with a sort of desperation. He must work for them both, he must hold by them both. He could never emancipate himself till he or they should die.

If, after this terrible realisation of what was before him, he looked upon the loss of the money with less composure, could any one be surprised? When he got home he went into his study, the room which was sacred to him, where he was free from all intrusion, where, however oppressive the domestic atmosphere might be, he could always escape from it, and feel himself alone. No such refuge would be his were he poor. He would have to sit and do his work at the same table where Aunt Anna spread out her beads and her wools, and worked her impossible, useless fancy work. Was it a duty, after all, to throw all his comfort, all that made life tolerable, at the feet of these two strangers? Geoffrey's heart was rent in two. His way was no longer clear before him, but covered with doubt and darkness and bewildering clouds.

With all this there was a something unsaid which had glanced across his mind many times in the course of the afternoon—a compromise, a way out of the worst of the trouble, a new life—but he did not dare to think of that. He pushed it away forcibly from the surface of his thoughts.

CHAPTER X.

"It is pouring rain," said Mrs. Underwood, "and he will get his death of cold. Oh, how can boys be so incautious; and just when he has heard what comes of it! Poor Leonard! I have not had time to think of him yet, with all you have been saying; but when one thinks how well one knew him once, and that he was our own flesh and blood! And Geoff doing the same thing, the very same thing, in spite of such a warning!"

"You are insufferable," cried Miss Anna; "hold your tongue, for Heaven's sake. Do you think the man died, whoever he was, only to give a warning to your son?"

"I think nothing of the kind, Anna. Poor Leonard, there never could be anybody more sorry; and his poor wife, I am sure my heart bleeds for her; but Geoff ought to take example by him, all the same."

"His wife?" Miss Anna said; and she laughed; "the wife of the man who left England thirty years ago with a broken heart. It has been on my mind ever since that I might have been kinder to him. I thought at first I had killed him." She laughed again. "I might have saved myself the trouble. He is dead now of a wet night—a great deal more deadly a thing than a love rejected; and here are you maundering about his poor wife. His poor wife! I have no doubt she'll marry again before the year's out. It's the way of the world."

"It is not the way of all the world, Anna," said Mrs. Underwood. She would not make a direct claim of superiority on account of her faithfulness, but she drew up her head a little and sighed, with a look of conscious merit; at which Miss Anna laughed the more.

"That is true," she said, "you've never married, Mary, nor wished to, I believe. You are a superior creature. I ought to have made an exception for you."

"Not so superior as you think, Anna," said the simple woman; "there is many and many another like me, that would not, could not—oh, no, no, for nothing in the world! Yes; I thought too that he never would have got over it, he was so devoted to you; but he was young; if you will remember, he was two years younger than——"

"Have done with these absurd recollections, Mary," said her sister angrily; "I want to hear no more of him. He's safely out of the way now at last; and there's his—there's these girls to deal with. If I had only been by myself and had all my wits about me I would soon have settled these girls; but I never have it in my power to act for myself. There was Geoff standing by with those keen eyes of his—not that I am afraid of his eyes. They don't know a single thing, these girls. If I had taken my own way I should have had them here, and made much of them."

"Oh, Anna, dear! I always said you had such a good heart!"

Miss Anna paused to look at her sister with contemptuous toleration. "Was any one talking of my good heart?" she said. "But, never mind, I would have taken them in. I would have been Aunt Anna to them. I would have packed them off to their mother with my love and a little present. To have to do with fools blunts the sharpest intellect. That is what I ought to have done. And it was all they wanted. To find their English relations, to get up a little sentiment; that was all they wanted; they have money enough; and they did not know a thing, not a thing! To think I should have missed my opportunity like that! A bit of china that would have got smashed on the voyage out, and our love; they would have written us gushing letters and talked of our kindness all their lives."

Mrs. Underwood, good woman, was puzzled. She did not understand what this meant. "If they had known you, Anna, I am sure they would have—loved you," she said, faltering a little. This was not always the result of more intimate knowledge in Miss Anna's case, but her sister had a robust faith. Miss Anna cast a contemptuous glance upon her, but it was not worth her while to argue.

"If it had not been for your son I would have done it," she said; "what could have been more easy? If Geoff had been out in the world, as I always said he ought to have been, in chambers of his own, not tied to our apron-strings, out of my way——"

"Anna! you never said such a thing before! You have always said you liked to have him at home."

"I like a man in the house," said Miss Anna; "I don't deny it. There is an advantage in having a man in the house, if he would hold his tongue and do what he is told; but as you have never known how to hold your own tongue about anything, Geoff knows all our affairs. What is the use of talking? I could have done it, but the opportunity is over. Now there is that little spitfire with her imagination all aflame. I should not wonder if she thought there was a dukedom dormant in the family, and a romantic vast estate that we are keeping from her; and Geoff with his ridiculous ideas and all that false nonsense about honour——"

"Geoff has no ridiculous ideas," said his mother, flushed and tearful; "there is nothing false about Geoff. He is honour itself, and sense and judgment; and he is as true as the day—and——"

"Everything that is perfect, we all know."

"I did not say that; he has his little faults, like all of us. He is a little hasty; he is perhaps too generous; but as for interfering with any kind thing you meant to do, Anna, you are mistaken, quite mistaken, my dear. Let me go and see them to-morrow; poor things, poor things! of course one wants to be kind to them. And to think that Geoff would have had any objection! For that matter," the mother said, faltering a little, "he has always so many invitations; people are always asking him; he might go away upon a visit while they are here."

"That is an idea," said Miss Anna; "but no, things have gone too far now; besides," she said with conscious malice, "that would balk me in one of my plans. If the worst comes to the worst we might marry him—to the youngest of them."

Mrs. Underwood sat bolt upright in her chair; the colour went out of her comely cheeks; her very voice failed her. "Ma—arry him!" she said with a gasp.

"They are both pretty," said Miss Anna; "and especially the little one—the younger one. I saw him cast many a glance at her. Oh, I notice that sort of thing always. Though I never married like you, I was not without my experiences. And I think I know. It would not have wanted much on

his side; and that would have saved your share of the money, which would always be something if the worst came to the worst."

Geoff's mother had become incapable of speech as this dreadful prospect was placed before her. She made a little movement with her hand, as if to clear it away.

"Geoff is thinking of nothing of the kind, Anna. Geoff—has his heart entirely in his home. He is just as simple-minded and as—pure-hearted as when he was a boy."

"Dear me!" said Miss Anna, "I thought it was the height of purity and simplicity to marry early; I have always been told so. Some French young men, who you know are the types of everything that is improper, can't be got to marry. But Geoff, being the best of good boys, of course will want to marry as soon as possible; and here is a capital chance for him. That was my plan, Mary—if the worst comes to the worst. If you have a better, of course I have nothing to say."

Mrs. Underwood sat all limp and down-fallen, every line of her showing the droop of dismay and depression which her sister's words, spoken in mere mischief—for the idea of Milly, though it had glanced across her mind, had gone no farther—had produced. "I——" she faltered, "Anna—I have got no plan. How should I have any plan? If they have a right to—the money, we shall have to give it up to them. And we will have to give up our pretty house, and live in—the poorest way. He says, Never mind, dear boy. He will work for us, he will never forsake us, Anna! Now you will see what my Geoff is made of. He has the best heart; but it will be a dreadful change, a dreadful change for him—he that has been used to have everything he wanted all his life."

"And you will rather let him fall into poverty, and be compelled to work, and have us two old women hanging upon him and cramping him—than save his share of the money for him and get him a nice young wife? That's what mothers are! I have always said, when they made such a fuss about their children, it was themselves they were thinking of. Now, what concerns me," said Miss Anna with only the malicious gleam in her eyes to contradict her dignified assumption of superior virtue, "what concerns me is Geoff's real advantage, not the selfish wish of keeping him for ever at my side."

Mrs. Underwood's countenance fell more and more. She looked haggard in the sudden severity of the conflict set up within her. "I—thinking of myself?" she said, almost weeping. But the accusation was too terrible to be met with mere tears, which are fit only for lesser matters. She gazed at her sister with large round eyes full of wretchedness. No crime in the world was so dreadful to her as this of thinking of one's self; it is the thing of all others which cuts a virtuous Englishwoman to the heart. "For Geoff's good, you know, you know, Anna," she cried, "I would submit to anything. I would go to the stake; I would give myself to be cut in pieces."

"Nobody is the least likely to cut you in pieces, my dear," said Miss Anna coolly. "The stake is not an English institution. It is easy to promise things that never will be asked from you. The question is, will you let Geoff be happy, poor boy, his own way?"

"Happy!" the poor lady cried in a lamentable voice; but then her voice failed her, though a dozen questions rose and fluttered through her mind. Could Geoff be happy in abandoning his mother? Would he give her up for a bit of a girl who never could love him half so well? Was it possible that there was anything wanting to his happiness now, watched over and cared for as he was? She sat gazing aghast into the vacant air before her, suddenly brought face to face with a question which was far more serious even than the loss of the money. If the money was to be lost, Mrs. Underwood felt in herself the power of enduring everything. To be housemaid and valet to Geoff would be, in its way, a kind of blessedness; it would knit the domestic ties closer. She would have more of her boy if they lived in a smaller space, in a poorer way; and with that happiness before her, what did she care for poverty? But her sister's suggestion brought in an entirely different circle of ideas. She saw herself dropping apart from Geoff's life altogether. He, happy with his young wife; she, set aside from his existence; and she looked at that visionary picture aghast. To be cut in pieces was one thing, to stand aside and let him go away from her was another. Was it all selfishness, as Anna said?

"I see I have startled you," said Miss Anna; "but it is too late for anything now; that eldest girl is not to be taken in. She will fight it out; she will drag us through the mire. Never mind, it was Geoff's fault, and Geoff will have to bear the brunt. But you will be able to keep him to yourself, and that will be a consolation," she added with a sneer. "Never mind what he has to put up with as long as you can keep him to your-

self: that is everything to you, I know. And there's the dressing bell, Mary. We must have our dinner, whatever happens," Miss Anna said.

But Mrs. Underwood, poor lady, did not have much dinner that day. She came down to the meal in her pretty cap, but it was a haggard countenance that showed beneath the lace. She could not talk nor eat, but sat mute at the head of the table choked with natural tears. To Geoffrey, who had come in hungry and full of thought from his wet walk, there seemed nothing wonderful in his mother's woebegone condition; it chimed in with the tone of his own thoughts. To some certain extent she would feel for him, she would sympathize with him, though even she could never know the whole extent of the sacrifice he would be called upon to make. The dinner was a very silent one. Miss Anna tried a few sallies of her malicious observations, but in vain. The others were too much depressed to take any notice, even to resent them. The old butler made his solemn rounds about the table with a gradual increase of curiosity at every step. Whatever was the matter? the worthy servant thought. He was a north-countryman, and knew a little about the family history; but an unfortunate chance had taken him out at the moment when the strange visitor arrived who had caused so much commotion in the house a fortnight since. The twilight hour, when it was too late for visitors (as he chose to think) was Simmons' hour for taking a little walk, sometimes to the post, sometimes to the fishmonger's, who had a way of forgetting. He had missed the young ladies too, of whom the housemaid had told such stories downstairs. But he saw there was "summat up," and he bent the whole powers of his mind, as was to be expected, to make out what it was. When Miss Anna's speeches met with no response she turned to Simmons, as she had a habit of doing when she was in want of amusement. "Did you hear any news when you were out for your walk?" she said. "If it were not for Simmons I should know nothing about my fellow-creatures. You never bring in a word of gossip from year's end to year's end, Geoff; and what is the use of a man with a club to go to every day if he never brings one any news? Simmons, you are a person with a better sense of your responsibilities. Tell me something that is going on outside. What's the last news in Grove Road?"

"There is no news, Miss Anna, as I am aware of," said Simmons, coughing a little behind his hand by way of prelude. "There is nothink that is of any consequence;" and then he began to tell of the gentleman at No. 5, whose conduct troubled the entire neighbourhood. Miss Anna had an eager interest in everything that was going on. She asked about the gentleman at No. 5 as if she had no greater interest in life. Her beautiful eyes sparkled and shone with eagerness. All the details about him were acceptable to her. A spectator would have vowed that she never had known a personal anxiety in her life.

Geoff sat late that night thinking over all that had happened and was going to happen. He had begun to ask himself what he could do to make a little money, and the answer had not been a satisfactory one. It is very common in novels, and even in society, to represent every young man who is without occupation as doing literary work and finding it always ready to his hand. And, naturally, Geoff thought of that among other things. But he did not know what to write about, nor to whom to take his productions if they were written. He knew what he had learned at school and at Oxford, but he did not know very much else. Classics and philosophy are very excellent things, but it is hard to make money of them immediately, save by being a professor or a schoolmaster, which were occupations Geoff did not incline to and was not fitted for. He did not understand much about politics; he was not deeply read in general literature; he had no imagination of the creative sort. In short, like a great many others, though he had all the will in the world to embrace the profession of literature, which seems such an easy one, he did not know what to do; and to hope to support his mother and her sister upon the few briefs which he was likely to get was ridiculous. As well attempt to support them by sweeping chimneys. He reflected with a doleful smile that even that required, if not special aptitude, at least special training, of which he had none. He was thinking of this drearily enough long after the rest of the household had, as he supposed, gone to bed, and all was still.

Suddenly his door creaked a little, softly opened, and his mother stole in. She was dressed in an old-fashioned dressing-gown, of what was then called a shawl pattern, with a muslin cap on her head tied round with a broad black ribbon. She had been going to bed, but had not been able to go to bed without a little reconciliation and kind good night to her boy. "Did we quarrel, mother? I did not know it," he said.

"Oh, quarrel, Geoff! we never quarrelled in our lives. You have always been the best of sons, and I hope I have always appreciated you. I couldn't go to bed, my darling boy, if there was the least little thing between me and you."

"But there is nothing, mother," he said, caressing the hand she had laid upon his.

"Yes, there is something; I could not rest for thinking of it. Oh, is it true, my darling, is it true that you want to be—married? If you had that in your mind I would never stand in your way, you may be sure I would never stand in your way. What is my happiness but in seeing yours, my boy? I would never say a word. I would give up and go away; oh, not far, to vex you, only far enough not to be spying upon you and her; to leave you free, if you are sure it is really, really for your happiness, my own boy."

"Mother!" cried Geoff, staring at her, "I think you must have taken leave of your senses. I—marry? at such a moment as this?"

"Anna thinks it would be the only thing to do. She thinks, Geoff, she says, it is—the youngest of the two."

Here Geoff, unable to quench entirely the traitor in him, blushed like a girl, growing red up to his hair under his mother's jealous eyes. "This is mere folly," he said, trying to laugh. "Why, I have only seen her twice."

"Sometimes that is enough," Mrs. Underwood said mournfully. "Things look so different at my time of life and yours. I dare say you think it is very fine to fall in love at first sight; but oh, when you think of it—on one side those that have loved you and cherished you all your life, on the other somebody you know nothing about—that you have only seen twice."

"My dear mother," the young man said. He made this beginning as if he intended to follow it up with a warm disclaimer and protestation of his own superiority to any such youthful delusion. But when he had said these words he stopped short suddenly and said no more.

His mother had her eyes fixed upon him, anxiously expecting to hear something in his defence; but when he thus broke down, and it appeared that he had no plea at all, no justification to offer, her heart sank within her. She stood by him for a minute waiting, and then she put her hand tremblingly upon his shoulder. "Have you nothing to say to me, Geoff?"

"I don't know what you would like me to say, mother," he replied somewhat impatiently. "What you are speaking of is preposterous. What might have happened in happier circumstances I can't tell—but that I should think of marrying anybody just now, and above all one of the people whose fortune we have taken from them——"

"Geoff! we never meant to take anybody's money. We never dreamt that it was not our own; we don't know even yet," said his mother, faltering.

"No; we don't know even yet; and perhaps I am wrong in urging you to a decision. Perhaps we ought to wait and see what evidence there is. It is a hard thing to contemplate, anyhow, mother."

"Oh, my dear! very hard, very hard! and if it separates you from me!"

"I do not see how it can do that in any case," he said coldly. It chilled him to think that her chief terror in the matter was lest there should be any opening of happiness to him in it. It was preposterous, as he had said; but still, was that the chief thing she feared—that he should have a life of his own, that he should be happy? It made him recoil a little from her. "Go to bed, mother; there is nothing that need disturb your rest, at least for to-night."

She would have stayed and questioned and groped into every corner of his heart, if she could, and protested that it was for him, not herself, that she feared anything; but Geoff was not so tractable as usual to-night. He opened the door for her, and kissed her and bade her good night with something like a dismissal. Then Mrs. Underwood perceived by a logic peculiar to herself that Anna was right, and that her worst fears were true.

CHAPTER XI.

Dr. Brewer came in upon the girls that same evening somewhat abruptly. He was a busy man, with little time to spare, and he thought his sudden arrival like a gale of wind was a good thing for them in the languor of their grief; but there was no languor about them as he found them. The table was covered with papers, dispatch boxes, and writing materials. Grace had turned out all the contents of her father's boxes, and was gathering together and examining every scrap of written paper, while Milly, with a pen in her hand, obediently wrote down the description of each. One little pile of business papers had been put by itself; letters were lying open; innocent little account books, memoranda of all kinds. It was like a man's mind turned inside out,

with all its careless thoughts, and those futile recollections of no importance which stick fast in corners when all that is worth remembering fades away. The doctor was astonished by the sight, and alarmed as well. He knew that the scrutiny of a couple of innocent girls innocently spying thus into every recess of the thoughts, even of the most virtuous of men, might not be desirable. "Hallo!" he cried, "you are so very busy, I fear I am an intruder. Is this necessary, do you think? Would it not be better to take all these things home?"

"Oh, doctor, you are our only friend—you can never be an intruder," cried Grace. "Yes, we intended to take everything home; but something has happened since—something that makes every scrap important. We are obliged to do it. It is for the sake of the children!"

"You are giving yourselves a great deal of pain, and you have had enough already," he said, seating himself at the table between them. "My dear young ladies, you are sure I don't want to interfere in your family affairs; but I feel responsible to your poor mother for you."

"What does it matter about us? Dr. Brewer, we have made a great discovery to-day!"

"I heard you were out," he said. "I was very glad to hear that you had been out—a little change is what you want. A great discovery! Well, so long as it is a pleasant one——"

"I don't know whether it is a pleasant one or not."

"You shall have my opinion if you will trust me with this important secret," said the doctor smiling. He was a man with daughters of his own. He knew the exaggerations, the excitements of youth; and he was very tender of these fatherless children. His friendly countenance, the very breadth and size of the man was a support to them, as they sat slim and slight on either side of him. But when he said this, they looked at each other with that look of consultation which had amused him so often. The doctor thought it was an unnecessary formula on the part of Grace, who always had her own way; but he liked her the better for thus consulting the silent member of their copartnership before she spoke. To his surprise, however, that silent member returned a glance of meaning—a sort of unspoken veto upon the intended disclosure.

"We have been to the place where papa was when he caught his cold—the same place; and in the same way."

Here again little Milly, shy and acquiescent as she was, signalled her disapproval. "Don't," she seemed to say, with those soft lips which never before had expressed anything but concurrence. The spectator was much more interested, perversely, than if the sisters had been as usual in perfect accord.

"Then you have found your relations?" he said.

"We don't know if they are relations. Yes, I think so; we had the strangest reception. Doctor, I don't know how to tell you. We are sure there is something underneath. An inheritance, of which papa has been cheated, which we, or rather our Lenny, is the right heir of. I suppose such things are quite common in England?" cried Grace, full of excitement. "You will be able to tell us what people do?"

"An inheritance!" the doctor said, amazed. And then he laughed a little, and shook his head. "No, my dear child, I don't think such things are at all common in England. They happen in novels, but not anywhere else, so far as I know."

This disconcerted the girls for a moment. For to be told that your own story is like a novel is always disagreeable, and throws an air of contempt upon the sternest facts. "It does not matter," said Grace shortly, "however much it may be like a novel, it is nevertheless true. We found the address in papa's letter case—nothing but the address—and we felt sure that was where he had gone, to see old friends, he said. We went there this afternoon thinking we, perhaps, might find friends, or at least hear something about that last visit. We were received by the strangest, beautiful old lady—oh, she was like a novel if you please!—who would have nothing to say to us. But the others," said Grace, getting somewhat confused, "talked of some one who had gone to see them that day, Tuesday, and had left in the rain—who was a relation—who was—or, at least, they said, pretended to be. Only it was quite a different name."

Dr. Brewer held up his hands to stop this broken flood of disclosure. "Stop a little, and take me with you," he said. "A beautiful old lady—and the others who said—but it was quite a different name. Now, tell me what all this means."

Then they both began to talk together explaining to him. "There was one lady, and her son, who were very kind," Milly said.

"She told us it was an impostor or a madman who had come, and said he was—

somebody," cried Grace; "but that *that* person had died long ago; and that our father was far more respectable; and that we could raise a great law-suit if we liked; and the others said if we were his daughters, it would make a great difference — oh, a very great difference to them."

"But they were very kind, and kissed us, and promised to come and see us," cried Milly, breathless, coming in again at the end.

"This is a very curious story," said Dr. Brewer. "I don't pretend to understand it very well, but so far as I can make out—— What was the name? Of course there are family quarrels now and then, and sons who bring a great deal of trouble upon everybody——"

"That could never be the case with papa," cried Grace proudly; "I am sure he must have been wronged."

"Many an excellent man has been foolish in his youth," said the doctor; "we must not take things too solemnly. If you will tell me the name, perhaps I may recollect if it has figured in the papers."

Here both the girls were up in arms. They confronted him with flaming eyes, and a blaze of anger.

"Doctor, I think you don't understand it at all. If you think our dear father, whom we have just lost,"—and here Grace's voice wavered, and Milly dried her eyes—"was likely to do anything that would be in the papers——"

"Why, my dear children," cried the doctor, "how unreasonable you are! Of course, he was in the papers a hundred times over. A man of note in his community—a public man with letters to the Colonial Secretary, and who entertained the Prince, as you told me yourselves——"

Here they looked at each other again, and blushed at their mistake.

"Yes, to be sure," said Grace. "Dr. Brewer is right, and we are silly. I was thinking of something else."

"Probably, for instance," said the doctor, "there were advertisements in what people call the agony column, entreating him to go home. You don't know the agony column? Oh, it is very easy to laugh; but there are sometimes appeals there that remind one of sad stories one has known. A doctor, you know, hears a hundred stories. What was the name?"

Once more that consulting look, and once more a blush of excitement tinged with real diffidence, and a little embarrassment of shame. Still they did not like to think of a name which was fictitious, of anything that was untrue about their history. "You know," said Grace, hesitating, feeling for the moment as if no inheritance, not even an old castle, or even a title, which had vaguely glanced across her mind as a possibility, could make up for this falsehood—"you know, we are not at all sure that it was papa. He never mentioned anything of the kind, nor did we ever hear it before. The name was Crosthwaite. It is not pretty; it is an odd name."

"Crosthwaite—Crosthwaite—where have I heard it? It is not pretty, as you say; it is a north-country name, Yorkshire perhaps, or—where did I hear it? Ah, I remember, some one had been making inquiries down-stairs."

"It was Geoffrey," cried Milly unawares: and then blushed more deeply than she had hitherto blushed either for shame or anger, and caught herself up, and drew back a little in embarrassment which did not seem to have any adequate cause.

"Then you know the people?" the doctor said in surprise.

"We know only their Christian names," Grace, somewhat startled too, explained eagerly to cover her sister. "The son is Geoffrey, and the old lady is Miss Anna."

"Bless me!" cried the doctor, "this is very peculiar. Oh! but you said there was another lady—a lady and her son? Yes, yes, I see—a Mrs. Somebody—and this Miss Anna."

"Mrs. Underwood," Grace said.

Dr. Brewer's surprise grew more and more. "I know a Geoffrey Underwood," he said, "a young barrister—a very nice young fellow. To be sure! he belongs to two ladies who live up Hampstead way. This is very curious. He is an excellent young fellow. He will tell me at once what the mystery is—if there is any mystery; but, my dear young ladies, I am afraid your romance will come to nothing if Geoffrey Underwood is in it; for you may be sure he is not a young fellow to lend himself to any bad business. Your beautiful old lady may be cracked, you know; she must be off her head—a harmless lunatic perhaps. I very much disapprove of it," said the doctor, with professional warmth; "entirely, in every way—but still there are people who, out of mistaken kindness, insist upon keeping such cases at home—a thing that never ought to be done."

Grace had listened with some dismay, feeling her house of cards tumbling about her ears. "She was not insane, if that is what

you mean. They were afraid of her. She was the one who talked the most. I am sure—I am sure she was not insane; and then Mrs. Underwood, too—you remember, Milly?—she said, 'If it is so we are relations;' and then her son, he said, 'It will make the greatest difference to us all.'"

"He said so? then perhaps after all there is something in it," Dr. Brewer said. The doctor began to look very serious after this. "One can never understand the outs and ins of a family. So many people that have a good deal of money to leave make foolish wills. It may be something of that kind. Bless me! poor young Underwood, a fine young fellow. I hope it is not very serious. You must excuse me if I see both sides of the case," he said, very grave; "young Underwood is——" and here he came to a dead pause.

Impossible to imagine anything more uncomfortable than the sensations of these two girls. They were silent for a little, and nothing was said round the table except a faint sound from the doctor of concern and sympathy, accompanied by the shaking of his head. Grace burst forth at last, unable to restrain herself.

"But, doctor, if it belongs to us rightfully, if it ought to come to my brother Lenny—a family estate—I don't know what it is—perhaps something that has belonged to us for hundreds and hundreds of years, perhaps something that would change his position altogether, and make him somebody of importance—isn't it my duty to stand up for my brother, to get him whatever he has a right to—although other people may have to suffer?" the girl cried, with passion.

Milly by this time was crying quietly, with her hands over her face; and Grace stood alone, the champion of the family rights.

"Yes, yes," the doctor said—"yes, yes; of course everybody should have their rights; other people must always be a secondary consideration." He added, after a moment's pause, "But don't take up any false ideas about family estates. Young Underwood is sufficiently well off, I have always heard. He has had a good education. I don't suppose he makes very much money by his profession, so he must be able to do without. But his people live very quietly. They live quite out of the way; they are scarcely in society at all. Dismiss from your mind any idea of hereditary estates or important position. All the same, money in the funds is very nice."

"Money in the funds!" said Grace, her countenance falling; while Milly took one of her hands from her face, and looked over the other like a sort of woebegone and misty Aurora from behind the clouds.

"Nothing more romantic than that, I fear," said Dr. Brewer; "but that's a very good thing, a very nice thing. No, life in England is not romantic to speak of; it's a very businesslike affair. If people have enough to live on, it doesn't trouble them very much how it comes. Land is dear. It's very nice if you have enough of it, but it's an expensive luxury. You get more percentage for your money even in the funds—and no risks."

"But, perhaps," said Grace, "as—Geoffrey—is not the right heir it might be something different. Perhaps if it came back to the old family there might be something different. Sometimes—things pass away, don't they, when it is not the direct line?"

"Peerages?" said Dr. Brewer with a laugh. "Oh, yes; but I never heard of property going astray. Money must find its level, you know; it must go somewhere; it cannot just be spilt upon the earth like water and made an end of it. It must turn up somewhere. When a man dies intestate, I believe his money goes to the Queen; which is hard, I have always thought. If it were divided among the poorest of his neighbours it would be more sensible. Sometimes a title drops by reason of a failure in the direct line. But I don't suppose you thought——" Here he stopped short, and gave vent to a sudden laugh. "I do believe, my poor dear girl, that this is what was in your mind—you poor child!"

"I never said there was any such thing in my mind," said Grace, growing crimson. She felt as if she could have sunk into the earth. She had nothing to say to defend herself, except this simple denial, and to hear the doctor laugh was terrible. He laughed so frankly, as at the most apparent nonsense. The girl did not know what to do. Was she such a fool as he thought?

"It is very romantic," he said; "but I fear, Miss Grace, in modern days such things happen very rarely. Life was a great deal more picturesque in the past. Now people are very thankful for such small mercies as money in the funds."

Grace made no reply. She felt very much disposed to cry; it seemed cruel that anybody should laugh at them in their circumstances, in their deep crape. The sound of laughter even was out of place in the room from which so lately the chief inhabitant had gone. She felt herself hurt, as well as ashamed, by being made the cause of merriment; and even little Milly, though she had not agreed

with her, uncovered her little tearful face, and was indignant in Grace's cause.

"I don't think there is so much to laugh at, Dr. Brewer," Milly ventured to say. "You were not there to see what happened. You would have thought it very, very important if you had seen how they looked, and heard what they said."

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor, "was I unmannerly? I didn't mean it to be. Why we should laugh at simplicity I cannot tell, but everybody does. I have not the least doubt it was a most natural mistake."

Simplicity! when everybody had always thought her so sensible, so superior to all delusions. Grace shrank back into herself. She would scarcely reply to any further questions.

"But, you know," Dr. Brewer said, with great gravity, "it is no laughing matter. Where there is a question of taking their living from another family, you must be very sure of your facts. It is such a hard case that a jury would give every advantage of a doubt to the people assailed. It would prefer to see what they did in the very best light. There would be a prejudice against the claimants, however much *dans leur droit* they might be. The evidence would have to be very exact, as clear as daylight. Any lawyer would tell you this. He would tell you, if your evidence was not beyond question, to accept, or even offer, a compromise. Such things are of every-day occurrence. You may have a strong case, but if you can't support it, and make it all as distinct as clockwork, they will suggest a compromise. Have you found anything among these papers to support the claim you are intending to make?"

"No."

"You say your father never spoke about it, never referred to his former name; gave you not the slightest hint of any rights of his in England?"

"No."

"In short, you have no proof at all?" the doctor said.

"Not any, that we know of," said Grace.

She sat, dogged and obstinate, answering only in monosyllables, or with as few words as possible, sitting bolt upright against the high back of her chair. Her heart had sunk, and her confidence was failing her; but she would not yield, or at least seem to yield.

"That is not very hopeful," said Dr. Brewer, "any lawyer would tell you. But you are determined, notwithstanding, to make out your case?"

"Yes," said Grace.

She no longer felt amiably disposed towards the doctor. He had cast down her dream-castle; he had represented her to herself as a vulgar money-seeker; he had overthrown all her romantic hopes of gaining advancement for her family, and making of Lenny a pattern English gentleman, perhaps nobleman. She saw now what a slender foundation she had built it all upon; but as nothing in the world would ever make Grace give in, she hardened herself over her inward confusion, and stood like a rock though her heart was quaking. The doctor made two or three sharp little speeches; but he was half-angry, too, that the girls upon whom he had been spending so much feeling should be so impervious to his influence. He got up hurriedly at last, and said something about still having some patients to see, though it was getting late.

"Good night," he said. "I should say I would be glad to do anything I could to help you, if I did not think you were embarking upon a most perilous undertaking. I think, permit me to say so, you should take your mother's advice first."

"I shall do nothing mamma will disapprove of," said Grace; and she parted with stateliness from this friend who had been the only one to succour them in their trouble.

As for Milly, she was very deprecating and tearful as she held out her two hands to him. "Do not be angry!" she said with her beseeching eyes. It was all the doctor could do not to stoop down and kiss this peace-maker as he went away. He had thought her a little nobody at first, but he did not do so now. "I declare she is as like Laura as one flower is to another," he said to himself as he went down-stairs. Now Laura was the doctor's favourite child—and what more could be said?

When he was gone, Grace returned to her previous occupation with her father's papers; but her heart was gone out of her search. "We might have asked him at least to recommend some lawyer to us," she said, which was the only observation she made to Milly on the subject. Milly, indeed, was dismissed altogether from the employment she had been trusted with before Dr. Brewer came in. Grace continued to look over the papers, to put one on this heap, and the other on that; but she no longer required Milly's pen to write down and describe what each was. For at least an hour they sat silent, the younger sister looking wistfully on, the elder rustling the papers, bending over them with puckers of careful consideration over her eyes,

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"To have you will be worth a great deal more than the money."—Page 54.

affecting to pause now and then to deliberate over one or another. At length Grace gathered them all together, with a sudden impatient movement, and, putting them back into the dispatch-box, concluded suddenly without any warning by an outburst of tears.

"To think," she cried, when Milly, greatly alarmed, yet almost glad thus to recover her sister, hurried to her—"to think that we should be going over all these things that were his private things just the other day—not for love, or because it was necessary, but for business, and about money! Oh, how hard we are, how heartless, what poor wretched creatures! I could not have believed it of myself."

"Dear," said Milly, soothing her, "it is because everything is so strange; and to do anything is a little comfort; and for the children's sake."

"I wish now," said Grace, with her head upon her sister's shoulder, "that we had telegraphed at once to mamma."

"Perhaps it would have been better," said Milly; "but you thought it would be so dreadful for her, without any warning."

Grace wept less bitterly when this instance of her own self-denial was suggested to her. "It is so long to wait—so long to wait," she cried. And then a sense of their desolation came over them, and the two forlorn young creatures clung to each other and wept together. Their nerves were overwrought, and they were able for no more.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was not very much more happiness under the roof of the house in Grove Road. Geoffrey, as has been said, sat half the night through in his study, with his head in his hands, pondering vainly what he ought to do. Though he said to himself that it was only just that they should produce their proofs, that they should establish their claim before anything was done, he jumped at the conclusion all the same, and took it for granted that the claim would be established, and that his own fate was certain. And after that what was he to do? He was as confused, as downcast as ever, when, in the middle of the night, he made his way through the darkness of the sleeping house and went to bed, but scarcely to rest. His mother, whose thoughts also had kept her awake, and who had cried, and pondered, and dozed, and started up to cry and doze again, heard him come up-stairs, and with difficulty restrained herself from going to him, and seeing that he was warm in bed, and had taken no harm from his vigil. She did not do it, fortunately remembering that Geoff was not always grateful for her solicitude; but her fears lest he should have cold feet mingled with and aggravated her fears lest he should fall in love, and marry and go from her—and altogether overshadowed her concern about their fortune and the chances that their money might be taken from them. Miss Anna, on her side, was wakeful too. That is, she lay among her pillows in profoundest comfort, with the firelight making the room bright, and candles burning in dainty Dresden candlesticks at her bedside, and one or two favourite books within reach, and turned everything over in her active mind until she had decided what course to pursue. Not one detail of all the luxury round her would Miss Anna part with without a struggle. She was determined to fight for her fortune to the very last; but if there was any better way than mere brutal fighting, her mind was ready to grasp it and weigh all its possibilities. She, too, heard Geoff, so late, a great deal too late, come up-stairs to bed, but only smiled at it somewhat maliciously, not without an enjoyment of the uneasy thoughts which no doubt had kept him from his rest, and no concern whatever about his cold feet. She lay thus, with her eyes as wakeful as the stars, till she had concluded upon her plan of action. As soon as she had done this she carefully extinguished the candles in an elaborate way of her own, so that there might be no smell, turned round to the fire, which had ceased to flame, and now shot only a ruddy suppressed glow into the curtained darkness, and shutting her eyes fell asleep like a baby. But even she, the most comfortable in the house, was far outdone, it need not be said, by the two poor young agitators in the hotel who had filled Grove Road with so many anxieties and cares. Hours before Grace and Milly, crying and saying their prayers in one breath, had fallen asleep in each other's arms, and knew no more about their troubles nor about the possibilities before them, nor anything else in the world, till the morning sunshine awoke them after eight long hours of perfect repose.

Miss Anna never appeared down-stairs till mid-day. She had enjoyed a great deal of bad health since she had ceased to be a young woman and queen of hearts. Latterly it had settled into rheumatism, which had made her a little lame, and justified a great deal of indulgence. Her attendants said that even this she could throw off when occasion required. But there could be little pleasure, one would imagine, in making-believe to be lame. Her general delicacy, however, gave rise to a hundred necessities which people in health manage to dispense with. Mrs. Underwood and her son had eaten a troubled breakfast long before her dainty meal was carried into her daintier chamber, and she returned to wakeful life under the influence of fragrant coffee and delicate roll, and some elegant trifle of cooked eggs or other light and graceful food. We say cooked eggs with intention, for boiled eggs, or even poached eggs, were vulgarities which Miss Anna would not have tolerated. She ate her pretty breakfast while her sister went through her household duties with a heavy heart, and Geoffrey took his way to town, striding along through the muddy streets, for it had rained all night. A little before noon she sent for Mrs. Underwood, who came up with a somewhat haggard countenance, ready to cry at a moment's notice, and with a cap which, in sympathy with her condition of mind, had got awry, and had greatly tried the nerves of the cook, who had a strong sense of humour, and felt her inclination to laugh almost too much for her. This was the first thing Miss Anna remarked when her sister came into the room. She uttered a suppressed shriek of horror.

"Did you give poor Geoff his breakfast with a cap like that upon your head? Good gracious! and then you think it wonderful

the poor boy should want to marry and have a trim, neat little wife of his own."

"What is the matter with my cap?" cried Mrs. Underwood in alarm, putting up her hands and naturally making bad worse. She almost wept with vexation when she saw herself in one of the many mirrors. "Why didn't somebody tell me?" she said piteously, with dreadful thoughts of Geoff's disgust, and of the comparison he must be making between that trim, neat little wife and a mother with her cap awry.

"Set it right now, and come and sit down here," said Miss Anna.

There could not have been a greater contrast than between these two sisters. One of them seating herself, timid and anxious, by the bed with no confidence either in her own judgment or in her powers of understanding, or capability of satisfying her imperious critic and companion—her anxious little mind on tip-toe of troubled solicitude to catch what Anna should mean, which was always somewhat difficult to her; while the other, with all her wits about her, seeing everything, noticing everything, lay amid her luxurious pillows and laughed at her sister's agitation.

"I wish I could take things as easily as you do, Anna—oh, I wish I could take them as easy!" Mrs. Underwood said.

"You were always a goose," was Miss Anna's remark; but she took the trouble to push aside her curtain and to draw close to the chair at her bedside on which the other sat, before she unfolded to her the plan she had formed—which Mrs. Underwood received with great surprise and many holdings up of her hands and wondering exclamations.

"Why, it was just what I thought I ought to do," she said. "It was all in my head, every word. I made it up in my mind to say to them, 'Anna may be against me, but you will never find me against you; and as the house is mine, and I have a right to ask whom I like——'"

"Stick to that," said Miss Anna with a laugh. "It was very impertinent and treacherous of you to think of saying it out of your own head; but now that we have settled it together, stick to that—it is the very thing to say."

"I don't see how you can call it impertinent, Anna; and treacherous!—me—to you! I have always been true to you. I can't think how you can say so. But it is true: the house is mine, however you please to put it. It was left to me expressly by dear papa. Of course, he made sure you would marry; and me a widow with one dear child, it was so natural that he should leave it to me. It will be all we shall have," she added with a sigh, "if this dreadful thing comes true."

"It will never come true if you play your cards well, Mary. You have got it all in your hands," Miss Anna said, "and it will be a fine thought for you that you have saved your family; though you never thought a great deal of your own powers—I will do you that justice."

Mrs. Underwood shook her head. "My own family—that is, my boy," she said.

"So it is," said Miss Anna. "Of course I don't count; but you will have the satisfaction, my dear, if you should live to be a hundred, of feeling that you have saved your boy."

At this Mrs. Underwood shook her head once more, and two tears came into her eyes. "He will be lost to me," she said. "Oh, I remember well enough how I felt myself when I married Henry. 'What does he want with his mother? he has got me,' I used to say. I never liked him to go too often to the old lady. And now I am the old lady, and his wife will think the same of me."

"Let us hope she will be a better Christian than you were," said Miss Anna, with a laugh.

"A better Christian! I hope I have always been a Christian at heart, whatever else I may have failed in. I hope I have always remembered my duty to my Maker," said Mrs. Underwood, offended. This assault dried the tears in her eyes. "And, Anna, though I'm sure I am not one to find fault, I don't think that you—never going to church, and reading French novels and things, and making schemes to keep your neighbours out of their rights——"

Miss Anna laughed with genuine enjoyment. "I acknowledge all my sins, my dear," she said. "I am not the person to talk, am I? But, never mind, perhaps there will be no need to hope that Mrs. Geoff should be a better Christian than her mother-in-law. Perhaps there will be no Mrs. Geoff. It may come to nothing after all."

"Oh, Anna, how cruel you are!" cried Mrs. Underwood. "If it comes to nothing what is to become of my boy?"

"Anyhow, let us be thankful that you will get a good deal of misery out of it, which will be a satisfaction. Go and get your bonnet on—your best bonnet—and make yourself look nice; we all like you to look nice; and go off, my dear, upon your charitable mission," Miss Anna cried.

Was it a charitable mission? The good woman quite thought so as she drove down the Hampstead slopes and made her way into the heart of London. She was fluttered and anxious about what she was going to do. The possible consequences to Geoff were like a tragedy in front of her; but as for anything else, she was too much confused to realise that this was not the kindest thing that could be done. Two lonely, fatherless children—orphans they might be called, for they had nobody to care for them. It was not right even that two girls of their age should live in an inn, without so much as a maid to be with them. To offer them a home, to stretch her own protecting wing over them, was the natural thing for a woman to do. Certainly it was the right thing to do. The other question about the property was very vague in her mind. She could see that her sister was scheming to keep it in her own hands, but her own mind was so confused about it that she could not feel any guiltiness on the subject. And then the question about Geoff would come uppermost. She wept a good many quiet tears over it as she drove along the streets. She had always felt herself a good Christian, but she had not been pleased when her husband had paid too many visits to the old lady. The old lady! Looking back, Mrs. Underwood, with an effort of memory, recollected that the old lady had not been so very aged a person. She was but sixty when she died, and she had lived ten years at least after her son's marriage. "About my age!" This conviction surprised Geoff's mother more than can be described. She was the old lady now; and this girl would grudge her her son's visits, would not let Geoff come to her, would persuade him that his mother was silly, that she was old-fashioned, that she wanted a great deal too much attention. She had done all that in her day, and had not thought it any harm.

These were her thoughts as she went to Piccadilly, crossing through all those endless streets. When she came near the hotel some one passed her quickly, holding up an umbrella, so that she could not see his face. But her heart gave a thump at the sight of him. If it was not Geoff she had never seen any one so like him. Down to the very coat he wore, the spats which she had herself buttoned for him, his walk—all was Geoff. Had he been here forestalling her? Had he come and made his own advances already, without losing a moment? Her heart sank, but a wild curiosity took possession of her. She would see for herself how he had been received, what had happened. What could happen but that this girl, any girl, would throw herself at the first word into the arms of Geoff? It was not often a girl had such a chance. "Look at Anna," she said to herself, "so pretty, so clever, and never married at all." Besides, since Anna's time there were, everybody said, twice as many women as there used to be, and a man like Geoff, if such a thing was to be found, was more and more precious than ever before. Ah, there could be no doubt how he would be received. Perhaps by this time it was all settled, and the girls were talking of her as the old lady, and planning how she was to be kept at arm's length. She wept once more, then dried her eyes, and armed herself for what might be awaiting her. What if that little thing should rush into her arms and tell her—giving her kisses that would not be genuine, that would mean no affection to her? But even that she would have to put up with. She remembered—with how many compunctions, though thirty years too late—how the old lady—poor old lady!—had made little attempts to propitiate her, and tell her pretty things that Henry had said of her, and give her to believe that nothing but praise and sweetness was ever spoken of her between the mother and the son. It would be her turn now to show herself in the best light to her daughter-in-law, to conciliate her, and appeal to her tolerance. Alas! how time goes on, turning triumph into humiliation, and the higher into the lower.

CHAPTER XIII.

GEOFF had not thought it necessary to say anything about his intention, but he had made up his mind during the vigil of the night to act for himself. He did not go to the chambers, which he shared with a friend, or to his club for his letters, or to any of his usual haunts; but went direct to Piccadilly, which is a long way from Grove Road. A long walk is sometimes an advantage when you are going to have a decisive interview; but Geoffrey, it is to be feared, did not do himself much good by thinking of the hostile party whom he was about to meet. They were not only not disagreeable to him, but the very sight of them stilled every warlike inclination in his breast. Not only he did not want to fight with them, but his desire was to take up their cause and fight it for them, against himself and all belonging to him—which it will readily be perceived was not a way to do any good. He saw them only too clearly in his mind's eye: the one

sister standing a little in advance of the other; the eyes of Grace shining with courage and high spirit, while those softer lights under Milly's soft brows rose upon him from time to time, always with a new eloquence of appeal. "If she were to ask me for my head, I think I would give it her," Geoff said to himself; but there was no chance that she would ask for his head. He thought of them as he had seen them first, seated close by each other, turning two wistful, pale faces and eyes wet with tears upon him as he stood at the door, alarmed by his own intrusion. Their black dresses and their piteous looks had made an impression upon him which would never be effaced; and he had heard their story with a knot in his throat, ready to weep for very sympathy. When the same wonderful pair had arrived at Grove Road, he had been too much startled to know what to do or say. But now he was going to them with all his wits about him, no surprise possible, to open up all the question, and discuss it amicably, and help them, if it was possible to help those whose cause was so entirely in opposition to his own.

Grace and Milly were together as usual in the sitting-room, which had become by this time so intolerable to them. They were both very much surprised when he came in. They rose to their feet in wonder and partial dismay. They had been talking over all their affairs, and had come to a kind of conclusion between themselves; but this was a circumstance upon which they had not calculated. They had thought it very unlikely that they should hear anything more of Grove Road unless they themselves took the initiative. They gazed at each other with their usual mutual consultation, bewildered; but as soon as they came to themselves they too were very anxious to be polite to their enemy.

"I hope you will not think me intrusive," he said.

"Oh, no; we do not know any one." This was intended to mean that a visitor was welcome; but the speech was broken off in consequence of the embarrassment of the speaker.

"If what we think is true, we—my mother and I—should be more to you than anybody else in England," Geoff said.

"But if what we think is true," cried Grace, "or rather what you think—for we know nothing—we are enemies, are we not?"

"I don't see why we should be. I have come to tell you all I know. You ought to have at least what information we can give you in order to find out who you really are, Miss ——"

"Yorke," cried Grace, "Yorke! that is our name; and as for finding out who we are, that is quite unnecessary. We may be strangers here," the girl cried, holding her head high. "We have been very unhappy and very unfortunate, oh, miserable here! But when we are at home everybody knows who we are. We are as well known as you or any one. The Yorkes of Quebec—you have only to ask any Canadian. If you think it is necessary to find out a family for us, you are very, very much mistaken! England is not all the world. We are unknown only here."

Her eyes flashed, her cheeks coloured as she spoke; all her pride was roused; and Milly held up her head proudly too. They had not been used to be nobodies, and they did not understand nor feel disposed to submit to it. This was a totally different thing from claiming their rights.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You know I don't mean anything disrespectful; but you know also that there is another question. It is not as Miss Yorke that there can be any question between you and me. It is as the daughter of my mother's cousin, Leonard Crosthwaite. Will you let me explain to you how the matter stands between us, if you are his children? This is how it is. Abraham Crosthwaite, an old unmarried uncle, died twenty years ago, leaving his money to Leonard, who had disappeared some time before. It was an old will, and it was supposed by everybody that Uncle Abraham had altered it in behalf of his nieces, Anna and Mary, who is my mother. But he did not alter it; and when he died this was the state of affairs. Leonard Crosthwaite had not been heard of for ten years: everybody thought him dead; he had been advertised for, and had not replied. My mother and Aunt Anna were the next of kin. They succeeded without a question. Everybody had expected them to succeed. Uncle Abraham had announced over and over again his intention to give them everything he had. My mother had taken care of him for some years; of Aunt Anna he had always been proud. I never in my life heard any question of their rights, until all at once, a fortnight since, some one appeared at our house calling himself Leonard Crosthwaite——"

"Mr. Geoffrey, papa would never have said he was any one, unless it had been true."

"I cast no doubt upon that. I tell you only of our wonder, our alarm. My mother thought she recognised something in him like

her cousin. Aunt Anna from the first said no; but you will take these statements for what they are worth. Aunt Anna would naturally resist anything that threatened to interfere with her comfort. My mother, on the other hand, is easily persuaded. I, of course, could say nothing on one side or the other. The gentleman I saw had every appearance of being a gentleman, and a man of truth and honour——"

Milly gave him a grateful glance behind her sister—a glance of tender thanks which made his heart beat. As for Grace, she bowed her head with a sort of stately assent.

"He was to come back; but we heard no more of him, until I came here to this hotel, and was entirely puzzled, as you know. I saw you, and thought you were very kind to interest yourselves about a person whom you had never heard of. When I saw you yesterday at Hampstead, I thought again it was kindness merely—that you had heard of the man of whom I was in search——"

"You must have thought us very extraordinary to interfere."

"I thought you," he said somewhat incoherently;—"but it does not matter what I thought you. Circumstances make us, as you say, almost enemies, who might have been—who ought to have been, dear friends."

They both looked at him with melting eyes. "Yes," said Grace, with a beautiful flush of sympathy, "cousins, almost like brothers and sisters. And, perhaps, that may be still!" she cried. "Listen, this is what we had made up our minds to——"

"Let me say out my say first," he said with a not very cheerful smile. "You are strangers, and you are too young to know how to manage such a complicated case. If you are Crosthwaites, and my cousin Leonard's daughters, it will be best for us in the long run, as well as for you, that it should be proved—that the question should be settled. And you cannot know of yourselves what is necessary. I have brought you the names of two good lawyers—respectable, honourable men, either of whom will advise you wisely." He took out a piece of paper as he spoke and handed it to Grace. "With either of these you will be safe," he said.

The girls looked at each other for a moment; then Grace rose up and held out her hand to her adversary, seeing him through wet eyes. "Cousin Geoffrey," she said, "I am sure you must be of the same blood with our father, for this is exactly what he would have done. Let us call you cousin, it is all we want, Milly and I. We had made up our minds this morning to forget it altogether, never to say another word or think of it any more."

Milly's hand was held out too, though more timidly. She did not say anything, but she looked a great deal more than Grace had said, he thought. He had risen too in a tremulous state of excitement and generous enthusiasm. It was only his left hand that he had to give to the younger sister, but even in that fact there seemed to both of them something special—a closer approach.

"I do not know what to say," he said, "dear, brave, generous girls! To have you will be worth a great deal more than the money. We are friends for ever, whatever may come of it." Then he kissed first one hand and then the other with quivering lips, the girls, blushing both, drawing close to each other, abashed, yet touched beyond description with a kind of sacred joy and awe. The emotion was exquisite, novel beyond anything in their experience; and the young man, thus suddenly bound to them, was as much affected as they.

"But we cannot accept this, all the same," he said at last. "I should say all the more. It must be investigated, and everything found out that can be found out."

"We do not wish it; we will not have it," the girls cried both together. But Geoffrey shook his head.

"You have nobody else to look after your interests. I am your next friend," he said. "Don't you know that is how we do in English law? Those who are too young or too helpless to plead for themselves plead by their next friend. And that is the most fit office for me."

"Then that makes England a little like what we thought it: not like the cruel, cruel place," cried Grace, "that it has been to Milly and me."

"It has been cruel," he said tenderly, with a voice which had tears in it, like their eyes. And there was not much more said, for they were all touched to that point at which words become vulgar and unmeaning. He went away shortly after, his heart swelling with tender brotherliness, friendship, and all the enthusiasm of generosity. The mere suggestion of their sacrifice had made him capable of that which had seemed so terrible to him an hour ago. He went out with his heart beating, full of high purpose and inspiration, quite happy, though that which had made him so miserable yesterday appeared now assured and certain. Such is the unreasonableness of youth.

When he had gone the girls turned to each other half laughing, half crying. They were happy too in this little encounter of generosity and impulsive feeling. "That is what we thought Englishmen were like," said Grace.

"And he is the first Englishman we have known," said Milly.

"Very different from Dr. Brewer," cried the elder sister.

Milly looked up, wondering, with a little "Oh!" of startled, almost wounded feeling. To compare Geoffrey to Dr. Brewer!—or to any one, she whispered deep down in her being, out of hearing even of herself.

They had scarcely recovered from the commotion of this crisis when some one again knocked at the door. "It will be *that* doctor," Grace said under her breath; and she was in no hurry to reply. It was only upon a second summons that she went forward slowly, reluctantly to open the door. And there outside stood Geoffrey's mother, somewhat fluttered, somewhat red, not knowing very well how to meet the two enemies of her peace. She came in with a little eagerness and kissed them both; and then she delivered herself breathlessly of her mission.

"I said I would come and see you to-day. Oh, my dears! I am afraid you thought Anna was not very kind yesterday. She is an invalid, you know; she has tempers now and then. Oh, I don't mean you to think she has a bad temper or is unkind. Nothing at all like that; but only—you can imagine if she had a bad night or a little extra ache. We ought all to be very forbearing, you know, and put up with people that are often in pain. Dear children! when I see you here in an inn, and think how many empty rooms we have got at home—there are more rooms, a great many more rooms than you would think in the Grove Road houses. And though Anna lives with me, the house, you know, the house is mine."

They did not know very well what answer to make, but they put her in the best chair the room contained, and sat round her listening, which was, of course, the best thing to do.

"Yes, the house is mine. I am the real mistress of it, though Anna often takes a great deal upon her; but I don't mind, I really don't mind. And when I have set my heart upon anything she never interferes. Do you know what I have come for now? I have come to take you both back with me home."

"Home!" the girls drew a long breath after the word. They seemed scarcely able to realise to themselves what it meant.

"Yes, home. I have set my heart upon it. If you are Leonard Crosthwaite's daughters—I declare," cried Mrs. Underwood, her real feelings breaking in through all the flutter of words that had been put into her mouth—"I declare I don't know whether I wish you to be Crosthwaites or not! Two nice girls—two dear girls; I am sure you have been nicely brought up, and that your mother is a nice woman. Poor dear!" said the kind soul, wiping her eyes and forgetting her rôle altogether. "My heart just bleeds for her, poor dear!"

This brought the girls, who could doubt, clinging round her, hanging about her. Their soft touch, their tender faces went to her heart. No woman who is good for anything, not even the jealous mother of an only son, defending him from all feminine wolves, can resist the contact of innocent girls—creatures of her own kind. It was a novel pleasure to Mrs. Underwood, who had never had a daughter, and had always been an exclusively devoted parent, absorbed in her son. She put one arm round each and kissed them again, this time in all truth and tenderness, and with her heart full of natural feeling. "Will she have heard of it yet?" she said in a tone of tender awe.

"Oh, not for nearly a week yet," the girls cried. And Mrs. Underwood wept in sympathy.

"Poor dear! Oh, God help her, poor dear! I know what it is myself; but I was with him till the last moment. She will think if she had been here it would never have happened. Oh, God help her, poor dear! Then," she added a minute after, as if this had been a reason, "you must just get your boxes ready and come with me at once, my poor children; I cannot leave you here. I tell you I don't know whether I shall be glad or sorry, if it is settled that you are Leonard Crosthwaite's children. Sorry, I suppose, because I shall lose my money; but now that I know you I should be almost as sorry to lose you."

This, though it was sudden, was real and true; for the kind woman felt that she had done them injustice. They were not dangerous adventuresses, hunting Geoff, but good girls, breaking their hearts for their mother, and counting the days till she should hear that terrible news. Mrs. Underwood jumped into enthusiasm for them because she had been so much afraid of them before.

"You shall not lose either us or the money," said Grace. "We had resolved

before Mr. Geoffrey was here, that we should do nothing more and think nothing more about it. If papa had meant us to do anything he would have said so. We made up our minds to this—this morning, before Mr. Geoffrey was here."

"My dears!" said Mrs. Underwood, bewildered. She had no head for business, and she could not understand more than one thing at a time. She withdrew her arm a little and said doubtfully, "Then Geoffrey has been here?"

"He came—in the most generous, noble way. I am so glad, I am so thankful," cried Grace, "and so is Milly—that we had quite made up our minds before."

Mrs. Underwood breathed forth a sigh of resignation. "I must hear all about this after," she said, faltering; "but, my dears, the fly is standing at the door, and it is no use keeping it waiting. Put up your things as quickly as you can. Anna thinks—I mean I feel quite sure that you ought not to be staying at an inn in your circumstances. If your luggage is too heavy for the fly the heavy boxes can be sent afterwards. Of course you have all your coloured things, poor dears; and to go into such deep mourning with nobody to advise you! The best thing will be to bring just what is necessary. Run and put your things together and I will wait here."

Then there passed between Milly and Grace a final consultation, several volumes in one glance. "Do you really mean that we are to go with you—to go home with you? Do you really want to have us?" said Grace with quivering lips.

"Oh, my dear, of course, of course I want you! And Anna—well, we need never mind Anna. You will amuse her too. She is very fond of clever people, and you are clever; at least *you* are clever, my dear," Mrs. Underwood said, patting Grace upon the shoulder; "and you are the little silly one, you will just do for me," she said, putting her arm through Milly's. Then her countenance clouded over. The girls did not know what to make of it. They could not hear the voice which was in Mrs. Underwood's ears—her own voice, saying, "I wonder why he should always be going to see the old lady—when he has me?" She gazed into Milly's face and wondered wistfully whether it would frown at her, and find fault with Geoff for his attention to his mother. "It is nothing, my dear, nothing," she said, recovering herself; "a little pain that I am quite used to. Go and get ready, like dear children; it will be such a surprise for Geoff."

Thus Mrs. Underwood carried out Miss Anna's plans. That lady smiled when she heard the arrival, the boxes carried up-stairs, the sound of the young voices in the house. She thought it was all her doing, and that Geoff was a young precisian and his mother a fool, and she herself the only member of the family capable of doing anything in its defence.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was, as his mother foresaw, a great surprise for Geoff, to see Grace and Milly established under her wing when he reached home. They seemed to have each got her corner of the drawing-room, as if they had been there all their lives. The windows with that great distance stretching blue and far underneath, and the smoke, which was London, at their feet, attracted them both—a standing wonder and miracle; but Milly had brought down her little work-basket, and placed it on a corner of Mrs. Underwood's special table, and there she had settled herself as if she belonged to it; while Grace had got to the books which stood in low bookcases on either side of the fireplace. For the first hour Geoffrey really believed, with a wonder which he could hardly restrain, that his mother had broken loose from her life-long bondage to her sister, and that this bold step had really been taken by herself on her own responsibility. It was herself who undeceived him on this point. When the dressing-bell rang, and the girls went up-stairs to prepare for dinner, he put his arm round her and thanked and praised her. "It was like yourself to do it, mother," he said warmly. "When you follow your own kind heart, you always do what is best."

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Underwood, faltering; "indeed, indeed, I hope it is for the best. At least, that has been my meaning, dear. And Anna said——"

"Anna?" cried Geoff, with a cloud coming over his face.

"She thought it was the only wise thing. But she is not to be supposed to know anything about it," his mother said, lowering her voice and holding up a finger at him. "You must be very careful. If she looks as if she did not like it, you are not to take any notice. I was not to tell anybody she had a hand in it; but of course I never meant to conceal it from you."

Geoff was so angry and disconcerted, and so sick of the domestic fraud into which his mother had been beguiled, that he went off to his room without a word, leaving her sadly put out, but quite unable to divine what



"He had carried all that mystery with him to the other world."—Page 63.

could have offended him. However, by the time he had changed his dress, Geoff, all alone in his room, burst out into a sudden laugh. "She is an old witch," he said to himself; "she is as clever as — the old gentleman himself." He was ashamed of the artifice, but could not help being diverted by the skill of that unseen helms-woman who managed everything her own way.

Miss Anna came to dinner as usual, leaning on her stick, and she received the girls with stately surprise, as if their presence was quite unlooked for, but gradually unbent, and by degrees grew brilliant in her talk and amused and delighted them. Geoffrey looked on with a mixture of shame, amusement, and contempt, at this pretended thawing and acceptance of what she could not prevent. She acted her part admirably, though now and then he surprised a glance of satisfaction and secret triumph which made him furious. But she kept up her show of reluctance so far that no one was invited into her boudoir that evening. They went back to the drawing-room again after dinner, where Geoffrey found both the girls

standing within the half-drawn curtains of the window, looking down upon the London light. They stood close together, talking low, talking of the great city all muffled and mysterious in mist, and smoke, and darkness, at their feet. When Geoffrey joined them, they stopped their conversation. "I am afraid I have interrupted you," he said.

"Oh no, no! We can't help talking of one thing. It is wearisome to other people; but after all it is only a few days. We were wondering where it was that *he* is lying," said Milly.

Geoff pointed out to them as well as he could where the spot was.

"We have so often talked of seeing London, and thought what it would be like and what we should like most in it," said Grace. "We little thought——"

He seemed to be taken into their confidence as they broke off and stood gazing with brimming eyes towards the place where their father lay.

"And now you will have no association with London but that of pain," he said.

There was a pause, and then it was Milly who replied, "People have been very kind to us. We can never forget the kindness wherever we may be."

To this Grace assented with a little reservation. "Yes, we shall not forget Grove Road —your mother and you, Mr. Geoffrey."

"What!" said Geoff, "are you drawing back already? I was Cousin Geoffrey this morning; and I do not think I have done anything to forfeit the name."

There was a little murmur of apology from both; and there is no telling how long they might have lingered there, with the light and warmth behind them, and the wide world of sky and air, and distant mighty multitudinous life before, had not Mrs. Underwood come forward anxiously to see what was going on. She had begun to feel herself deserted, and to remember again what she had once felt and said about the old lady. She had not so much as thought of the old lady since she brought them into the house; but now the murmur of voices behind the curtain; the natural, inevitable manner in which Geoff found his way there; the solitude into which she was herself thrown, brought back all her alarm. "Geoff," she said, "you must not keep them in the cold; there is a great draught from that window; we always have the curtains drawn. Come in, my dears; come in to the fireside; that is the best sight you can have on a cold winterly night."

They came directly, obedient to the call; there was no undutifulness, no resistance. They must have felt they were doing wrong, they obeyed so quickly, she thought. But then Mrs. Underwood had a very happy hour. Geoffrey took up the evening paper which had been brought in for him—Miss Anna having previously finished it and sent it with a message that there was nothing in it—while Grace returned to her examination of the books, and Milly settled herself by Mrs. Underwood's side. She was glad to see that he could still think of politics, although they were here. Miss Anna, in order that she might come down gradually from her eminence, had left the door of communication open between her room and this one, and sometimes launched a word at them, stimulating their somewhat languid talk. For neither Mrs. Underwood nor Milly were great talkers; they sat together, finding great fellowship in this mere vicinity, now and then exchanging a word as they lent each other the scissors or the thread. And Geoff read his newspaper calmly in this calm interior, where no appearance of any power or passion which might break old ties or form new ones was visible.

Thus the soft evening sped along. It gave Mrs. Underwood a little tremor to see that when Geoff laid aside his paper he went to the table at which Grace was seated with a number of books round her, and began an earnest conversation. But she reflected within herself that it was not Grace but the little one, and took comfort. Perhaps she would not have been so much consoled had she known what the subject of the conversation was. Grace was so buried in the books which she had collected from the shelves, that she scarcely noticed, till he spoke, the shadow which was hovering between her and the light.

"I want to tell you," he said—and she started, looking up at him with a little impatience, yet—as remembering the calls of politeness, and that she was his mother's guest—with a smile—"I have laid the whole matter before the lawyer whose name I gave you to-day," Geoffrey said.

"The whole matter!—there is no whole matter; nothing but guesses and perhapses. We do not want anything more said about it, Cousin Geoff."

"But we must have something more said about it, Cousin Grace. Who can tell? It might be dragged to light in the third or fourth generation," he said with a smile. "Your grandson might question the right of mine, to any small remnant that may be left by that time."

"I will answer for my grandson," said Grace.

"But I cannot answer for mine; probably he will be a headstrong, hot-headed fellow. No, it must be settled now. Mr. Furnival wants to know what evidence you have, one way or another; if you have anything that throws light on the subject; any clue to the past or information about the family or name? You may trust anything to his hands."

"But I told you we had no information whatever—none. I never heard the name before. My brother is called Leonard, that is the only thing; and there are one or two memoranda of papa's."

"These will be of the utmost value."

"I don't think you will find them of any value at all. One is in his little diary that he kept during the voyage. I do not like to give it into any stranger's hands. No, there is nothing private in it; but only the little things that—that are more hard to look at than great ones," said Grace with her eyes full. "Little, little things that we did every day—that we never shall do any more."

There was a pause, and then he said, insisting gently, "You must not think me troublesome and pertinacious; but you may be sure it will be handled with reverence, and given back to you without delay."

"You can't think how little it is, it is nothing," she said; but finally she consented to bring all the scraps together and place them in Geoff's hands. They were not much when they were put together. First, the entry in the diary: "Same name in directory at old address. To go first thing and inquire." Then the still more hieroglyphical notes written on the same paper which contained the address, "Left July '45. U. A. died '55. Due with interest for twenty years—forgiven;" and the repeated 3, Grove Road, written over his blotting-book, and repeated on at least two pieces of paper. Geoff folded them carefully up, and sealed them into a packet. His mind was heavy, but his heart was light. He saw moral confirmation indisputable in these scraps of writing. It seemed to him that in no way could his mother retain her fortune against a claim so certain; but he saw at the same time that there could be no legal proof, and that his aunt would be triumphant and retain hers. Was not this the best solution of the matter that could be? He did not see his way yet about his own work and ability to make up to his mother for what she must lose; therefore his mind was troubled and in difficulty still; but to know that when he came home at night he should find Milly shyly smiling at Mrs. Underwood's side, taking her place as if in her own home, beguiled the young man out of all his cares. Whatever happened, nothing could take from him this sweet evening, and other sweet evenings like it.

A week of close domestic intercourse, long evenings spent together, how rapidly acquaintance grows under such circumstances! They made the most delightful family party, moving from one room to another in the long delicious evenings, cheerful, though still subdued by the recent grief which was so ready to revive in the girls' eyes at any chance allusion. This made a tenderness in their intercourse which nothing else could have done. Even Miss Anna was tender of the young mourners, though it was she who most steadily exerted her powers to cheer them, and win from them smiles, and even laughter, and a hundred little returns towards amusement, towards the brighter impulses of life. But perhaps what they enjoyed most was to stand behind the half-drawn curtain in the evenings, and gaze out on London, and talk, with tears which no one rebuked, which Geoff, their only companion, if any reliance could be placed upon his voice, was often very near sharing. They told him about their father, about the household at home, about their first glorious morning in London, when they had gone to Westminster and feared no evil; and Geoff listened with sympathy, with tender curiosity, with all the youthful freemasonry which understands almost without a word. While these talks were going on, Mrs. Underwood, stranded as it were outside, would sit fidgeting in her chair, longing to interfere, thinking within herself of the old lady left alone, and scarcely able to restrain her trembling anxiety, lest things should go too far, and her doom be sealed. Miss Anna, on the contrary, watched over the young people, going and coming with that little pat of her stick upon the floor, and restraining her sister. "You simpleton," she would say in a whisper, "don't you see everything is going to a wish? What could you desire more? They are getting acquainted; they are getting on as fast as possible." "Oh, but Anna!" poor Mrs. Underwood would say, getting up and sitting down again. "My boy, my boy!" "Oh, hold your tongue, you silly woman! Your boy is happier than he ever was in his life," said the imperious sister, sitting down to keep watch over Geoff's tranquillity. Mrs. Underwood dared not stir, with Miss Anna guarding her

like this; but she moaned within herself and shook her head. It was all a conspiracy to take her son from her. She liked the little one well enough—nay, very much, as she sat on the low chair, and talked a little now and then, and was always ready with the scissors. Mrs. Underwood had a way of losing hers, and she had never had a daughter to find them for her, to know by instinct when she wanted them for her work as Milly did. That was all very pleasant. And it might be good as a family arrangement; Anna thought so, and Anna knew best; but to tell her that her boy had never been so happy—though she had devoted herself to him all her life—this was indeed too much to bear.

CHAPTER XV.

A WEEK after their settlement at Grove Road, while the girls were expecting every day to receive at least by telegraph some news from their mother, Geoffrey made his appearance in the middle of the day, and with a face of much serious meaning. He asked his mother and her guests to come with him to Miss Anna's room; and then having gathered them all around him, he took out some papers and made a little speech to them with great seriousness. "I thought it was of the utmost importance that we should all know exactly how we stood," he said, "and I put the whole case into Mr. Furnival's hands. We all trust him who know him, and Grace and Milly were willing to take him on my word. He has had all the facts before him for some days; with such scraps of evidence as you could furnish us with," he added, turning to Grace, "and he took counsel's opinion. I informed him that it would be in any case an amicable suit to settle our respective rights. I have brought you their opinions now."

"I thought there was something going on," said Miss Anna, "something underhand, a conspiracy, concealed from me."

"Conspiracies are not in my way," Geoffrey said. "Perhaps you would like me to read what they say. It confirms my own opinion—though perhaps my advice would have been different."

He spread out his papers on the table, and the women round him turned their eyes to him with expressions as different as their characters: his mother proud of the position her boy was assuming, yet a little nervous as to how Anna would take it, and suspicious of the look which she thought she detected him directing towards Milly; Grace a little reserved, holding her head erect, looking at him with an interest which had not much curiosity in it, but a rising impulse of resistance—although she could not tell as yet what it was she was to resist; Milly with milder interest and a gentle admiration of Geoff which was like a shy shadow of his mother's. But Miss Anna, all alert, turned eagerly towards him as if she would have snatched the papers out of his hands, her dark eyes blazing, her whole figure full of energy and latent wrath, which she was ready to pour out upon him should the lawyers' opinion go against her own.

"I need not read it word for word," said Geoff; "I will give it afterwards to my cousin Grace. The lawyers think, after close consideration, that there is—no case——." (Here there was a movement on the part of Miss Anna and a quick "I told you so.") "Wait a little," said Geoffrey. "They say there is scarcely any case to go to a jury; but they say also that if it did go to a jury the strong moral probability and the touching character of all the circumstances might lead to a verdict for the claimants notwithstanding the weakness of the evidence. Law would be against it; but the jury might be for it."

"I understand that reasoning," said Miss Anna: "most men are fools, and jurymen are men—therefore it is likely that fools being the judges, the verdict would be preposterous. Is that all your wiseacres have got to say?"

"Not quite," said Geoff; "the lawyers advise a compromise."

"A compromise? I object—I object at once. I will not hear of it. Let it go into court. If I am compelled to yield to the sentiment of a dozen British idiots, I must do so; but consent to rob myself, for no reason? oh no, no! I will never do that."

"Aunt Anna, you are not the only person concerned."

"I am," she said; "I have the largest share. I am the eldest. Your mother has never gone against me in her life, and she will not now."

"Anna," said Mrs. Underwood tremulously, "I always have followed your advice—oh, always, it is quite true; but Geoff, you know—Geoff is a man now; and he has been bred up to the law, and he ought to know better, far better than we do."

"Should he? but he doesn't; he's a poor weak sentimental creature not strong enough to be either one thing or another, a swindler or an honest man. He naturally takes refuge in compromises. I haven't known him so long without knowing that. I believe the lawyer's opinion is his own, it is so like him.

A compromise? no! I will have no compromise," cried Miss Anna, striking her stick upon the floor.

"And we reject it too," cried Grace—"we will have nothing, nothing! we settled upon all that before we came here. If we had not decided so, we should never have come."

"Let it go to a jury if you like," said Miss Anna, paying no attention to this. "I am not afraid. I take the risk of sentiment. Yes, of course, they are a pack of sentimental fools: two pretty girls in deep mourning will get anything out of a British jury. Still I'll risk it. But nothing, nothing in the world will make me consent to a compromise."

Grace had risen to her feet, with her usual eagerness of impulse, "Do you not hear me—do you not understand me, Miss Anna? We will take nothing; we will have no compromises, no more talk even, not a word said. We will have nothing, nothing to do with it! We have a right to be heard as well as you——"

"And I think I also have a right to be heard," cried Geoff—he was calm between the excitement of the others; "I am not without a voice. Whatever you say, justice must be done, and justice suggests this course. Yes, Aunt Anna, whatever you say, I have a right to be heard. It is for our own comfort, without thought of them."

"I want no such comfort," she cried. "I gave in to your mother's nonsense, and allowed them to be asked here. I allowed them to be asked because they were——"

"Aunt Anna! do you wish me to tell them in so many words why you wanted them——"

"Geoff, Geoff!" cried his mother, in alarm.

The girls paid but little attention to this quarrel as it raged. They did not comprehend even what it was about. "We had better go away as this is not our affair," Grace said, with a stately little bow. And Milly, too, rose to go with her sister—when the conflict around suddenly ceased, and the two girls, who seemed to have been pushed aside by the other more energetic emotions, suddenly became again the centre of the scene, and the chief persons in it. What was it? only the entrance of old Simmons with a brown envelope in his hand.

The others stopped short in their conflict. They acknowledged with a little awe the presence of supreme grief in which they stood. They looked on in silence while the girls, clinging together, read their telegram. Then there was a little pause.

"We must go home at once," said Grace, as well as she could speak for tears. "We do not require to wait. There are steamers every day, I suppose. Would you answer this for us, Cousin Geoffrey? and say we want no one. We will come."

It required some power of divination to make out the last words, which were almost choked with the weeping to which Milly had entirely given way.

"Go at once?" said Miss Anna, "without an escort—without seeing anything?"

The girls gave her, both together, an indignant look; and then they turned and went out of the room, moving in one step, like one creature, with a soft sweep as of wings. So at least Geoffrey thought, looking after them with the tenderest pity in his eyes. They did not walk but disappeared, flying to be alone and get some comfort from their tears.

"What does the telegram say—who sends it—is it long or short—is it from the mother herself, is it—?" Miss Anna put out her hand and tried to take it from Geoff. Both the ladies were full of curiosity. Mrs. Underwood, indeed, in sympathy with the trouble of the girls, dried her eyes as she looked up eagerly for news—but Miss Anna owned no trace of tears. She was full of interest and keen curiosity. "Give it me. The very wording of it will tell us something more about them," she cried.

Geoff's first movement was to hurry away, carrying this communication with him; but he paused as a new idea took possession of him. He was too good a man to be altogether a free agent. He paused, and looked at the mother upon whom he knew he was about to inflict a great blow. She was not a wise woman, and the instinct of curiosity which had possession of her at the moment was not one to please that critical faculty which is so exaggerated in youth. He did not like to see in her eyes even a shadow of the hungry appetite for news which burned in her sister's. Nevertheless, he read the telegram slowly.

"Your terrible news just received. Mother utterly prostrated. Wire if wish me to come for you—otherwise return first ship."

The name of the sender was a strange one—it was evidently an uncle or some relation who could speak with authority. Geoff paid no attention to what the ladies said, but went on. "Mother, I am going to say something which will vex you. You must try to remember that I am old enough to take care of myself. I am going with them, to take them to their mother."

"Geoff—Geoff—by sea!—to America!"

Mrs. Underwood gasped; she could not get her breath.

"Of course it must be by sea if he goes to America," said Miss Anna. "There is no land passage invented yet."

"It is my plain duty," said Geoff, colouring a little, "if, as I believe, they are our near relations; and in any case there is a question between us which they are too young in their generosity to settle. We cannot take advantage of the generosity of two children, mother——"

"Oh, Geoff! but for you to go—to go to America—a long voyage, and at this time of the year——"

"The equinoctials coming on," put in Miss Anna quickly.

"The equin——, yes; nothing but storms and shipwrecks, and every kind of danger. If you mean me never to have a night's rest more—to go distracted every wind that blows—to have neither peace nor comfort of my life—Oh, Geoff—all that, for them that you never had seen a fortnight ago! and me, your mother, that have never had another thought but you for eight-and-twenty years——"

"Surely, mother," cried poor Geoff, "there is no need to put it so tragically. I am not going to abandon you. I am only going to do what half the men of my age do for pleasure—and I shall have a real motive in it. In the first place, a duty to Grace and Milly: if they were your children, how should you like them to go over the sea all alone, when a great idle fellow calling himself their cousin was here doing nothing? And then this business, which otherwise may worry us for years, which we never can be sure about—for if these dear girls, in the generosity of their hearts, refuse to have anything to do with it, who can tell that their mother, their brothers will be of the same mind?"

Mrs. Underwood had fallen into tears and broken exclamations. She was incapable of any connected words. "Oh Geoff—my boy—all I have—all I have in the world!" and "a sea voyage—a sea voyage to America," was all she said.

Miss Anna got up to her feet, and struck her stick emphatically upon the floor. "Listen, Mary! I have said your son was soft, and a dawdle like yourself. I retract. He's a clever fellow, and sees the rights of a matter when it's put before him. There, Geoff! go, and you have my blessing. I'll give you a hundred pounds, too, if you want it, that you may have a pleasant trip. Your mother's talking nonsense. I never knew her lose a night's rest, except when you were teething; and then that was your doing, not hers, for you squalled all night. Go, my boy, and success to you. It's the wisest thing you ever thought of in your life."

"Oh, Anna!" cried her sister, "how can you be so cruel?" She had dried her eyes at these accusations, and sat up with a flushed countenance. "If you knew, if you only knew half what a mother goes through! Do you think I have always told you when I lay awake thinking of him—or any one? Geoff, I have never denied you anything; but I think it will break my heart!"

"Mother," said Geoff, half pleading, half angry, "I run no more risk than half the women's sons in England—no risk at all; you make me feel a fool to talk like this."

"Never mind," said Miss Anna, while Mrs. Underwood relapsed into weeping; "I'll bring her round. Go off at once, there is plenty of time, and see about your berths. You'll find her quite reconciled to it when you come back."

"But Aunt Anna, I don't understand the change on your part. You, who rejected all idea of a compromise——"

Miss Anna laughed. "I have no objection to one kind of compromise. Bring us back that little dove-eyed thing as Mrs. Geoff. I'd rather have had the other; but you could never have managed her. Settle my money upon Milly in her marriage settlements; and don't mind about our absence from the ceremony. Go and see Niagara, and all that, and bring us back your wife—that's the kind of compromise I want; that's all I stipulate for, Geoff."

"If I can, Aunt Anna."

"Pooh—can! With a week under the same roof, and a fortnight in the same ship. Rubbish! If you can't, you are a poorer creature than I thought. Go, go, off with you, Geoff—before your mother comes to herself."

"Where is Geoff going? Oh, Anna, help me, help me! don't let him go. Geoff!" cried Mrs. Underwood.

Upon which Miss Anna confronted her sister with her most imposing looks. "Mary! don't be a fool. The boy is doing precisely what he ought to do. I never had such a good opinion of him before; let him alone. He is fifty times better able to take care of himself than you are to take care of him. Here's the telegram; let us see what it says."

"It says, I suppose, just what he read to us, Anna," said the other, frightened into some degree of self-denial, and with a little curiosity re-awakening in her blurred overflowing eyes.

"A thing never says anything to you when it's read aloud. Here it is. 'Stephen Salisbury, Quebec, to Grace Yorke, Montague Hotel, London.' (Then it was sent on from the hotel.) 'Terrible news received; mother prostrated; wire if wish me to come.' Of course it must be the mother's brother. The people must be well off, Mary. There cannot be any doubt about that. You see he says he will come if they want him; and even the message shows it. The man would never have sent such a long message if he had not been well off."

"I always knew that," said Mrs. Underwood feebly, "from what Grace and Milly said. Why shouldn't their uncle (if it is their uncle) come for them? I don't know why they should be in such a hurry to get away?"

"It is a great deal better that Geoff should go with them," Miss Anna said. "Pluck up a heart; or if you can't do that, get a little common-sense, Mary; common-sense will do just as well. Why should anything happen to a Cunard steamer because your boy happens to be in it more than another? Do you think God has a special spite against *you*?"

"Oh, Anna!" cried her sister, horrified; "me? I know God is merciful and good: but——"

"But you would rather not trust Geoff in His hands, lest He should take a cruel advantage? That is the way of people like you."

"I never said so; I never thought so. I—I hope I have always put my trust in God."

"But you think, all the same, if He had a chance like this, that He would like to do you an ill turn? Oh, I understand what you mean. I have heard a great many people—pious, devout people—speak just like you."

Mrs. Underwood relapsed into speechless misery. Against such an accusation as this, what could she say? She who never missed church, nor ceased to profess her belief in Providence. She was silenced altogether. She wept and sighed the name of Geoff now and then; but there was nothing more to say.

Geoff went down to the City without loss of a moment. He secured berths in a steamer which was to sail in three days; and with a bound of pleasure and conscious pride in his heart found himself engaged for his passage across the Atlantic. He went home very soberly, but with the blood coursing in his veins. He had taken such an initiative now as he had never been able to take in all his life before. He had emancipated himself at last. It was, however, with a little apprehension that he turned homeward. Whether his mother would impede his way with weeping, whether the sisters would reject his escort, he could not tell; but his fears in both cases were unnecessary. Mrs. Underwood had been reduced to subjection some time before he got home. And as for Grace and Milly, they were neither excited about his proposal nor disposed to refuse it. They took it as the most natural thing in the world. There was a gleam of brightness, he thought, in Milly's face, but Grace paid very little attention to it. Geoffrey was a little cast down when he perceived that they saw nothing at all heroic in his mission, nothing that anybody would think twice about. But he had to console himself with Miss Anna's declaration that a fortnight on board ship would settle all questions. He himself felt a great confidence that everything would come right in the end.

Thus the difficulty was brought to a conclusion, in a way little contemplated by the Canadian who once had been Leonard Crosthwaite, and had broken his heart for his cousin Anna. When the young people were gone, the two ladies from Grove Road made a little pilgrimage to the great, grey, dismal London cemetery in which all that remained of him lay—where Mrs. Underwood laid some flowers, and Anna gazed with eyes that looked as if they could penetrate the very secrets of the grave upon the mound under which the lover of her youth slept in peace. What were the thoughts that had lain concealed within his breast for thirty years, yet which had brought him, carrying fear and confusion which he little anticipated, to her dwelling the first day he spent in England, no one could tell. He had carried all that mystery with him to the other world.

And after a while Geoffrey Underwood came safely back from the terrible voyage which had so much alarmed his mother, bringing with him, exactly as Miss Anna had foreseen and commanded, his young wife. She was far too young a wife, her mother thought, to venture so far; but Milly did not think so. How to do without Grace, and to think for herself, was more difficult to Milly than the distance and the voyage. But she did what was a great deal easier than thinking for herself—she transferred all the responsibility to her husband. Nothing could be handsomer than the marriage settlement which Miss Anna made. She made the little bride her

own representative, with the larger share of the fortune. And the Canadian family were well pleased, and asked no more. Indeed, all that Mrs. Yorke desired was that nothing should be said about this strange illumination thrown at the last upon the husband who had been hers for twenty years, and who now seemed to be stolen from her and changed into another man. She would not listen to any explanations on the subject; the sound of the other name was odious to her. She took even from her boy, Leonard, that name of his which came from his father's old life, and jealously called him Robert, which was his second name.

Almost a year elapsed before the young pair came home. They arrived on a bright April afternoon, when the sun was shining



"I always said I would accept but one compromise."

over the great smoke. The windows were open: the lawn all green with spring, and set in a frame of English primroses, looked as fresh as the bride herself, who recognised it, and the difference in it, with a little cry of pleasure. Mrs. Underwood threw herself, as was natural, upon the wonderful son who had been delivered from the seas, who had not been drowned, or swallowed by a whale, who had come safely through marriage, and all the other terrific dangers to which he had been exposed; but Miss Anna walked across the room with a little stately limp, casting aside her stick, and took little Milly in her arms. "Welcome!" she said, "little girl with the dove's eyes. I always said I would accept one, but only one, compromise!"